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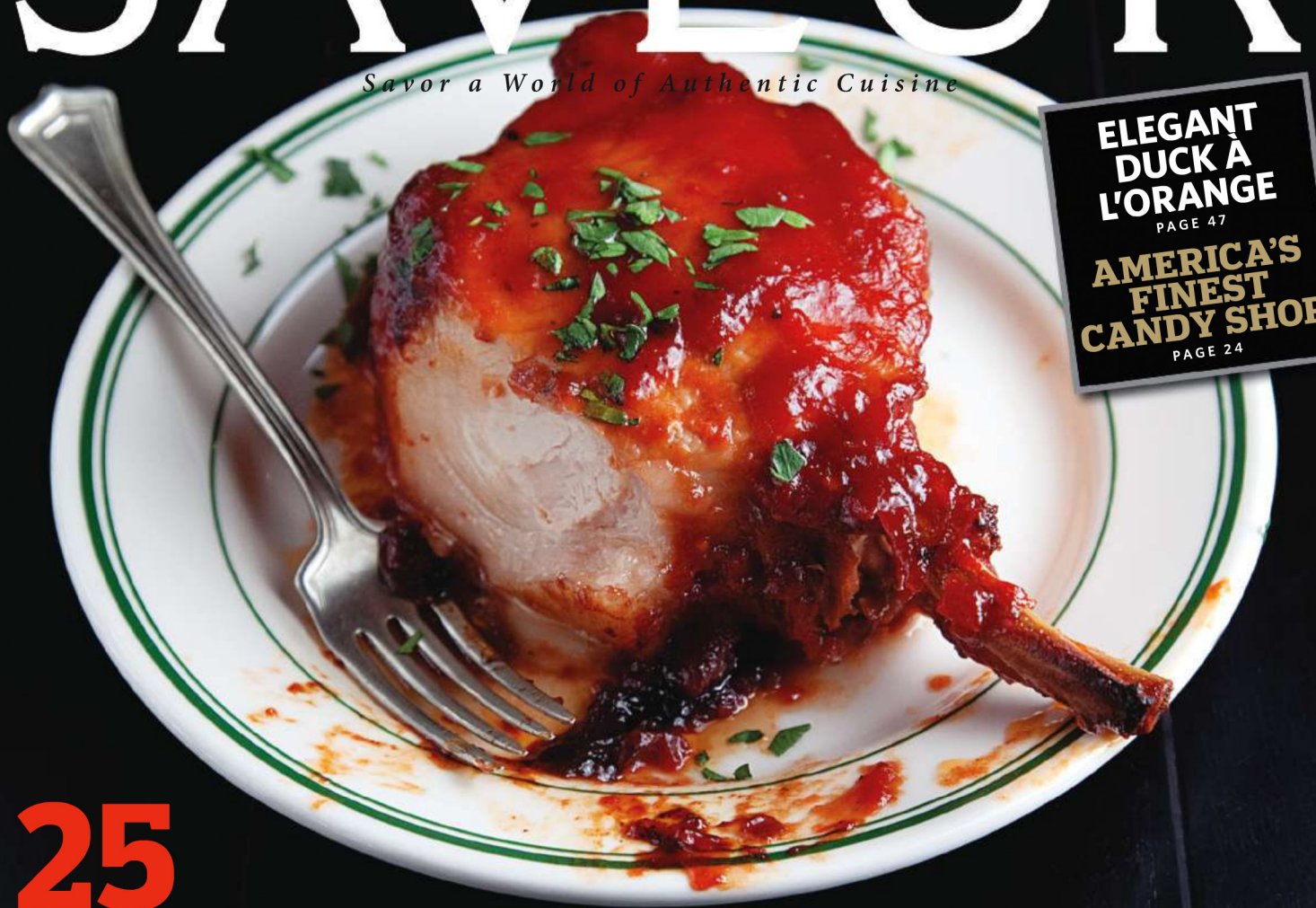

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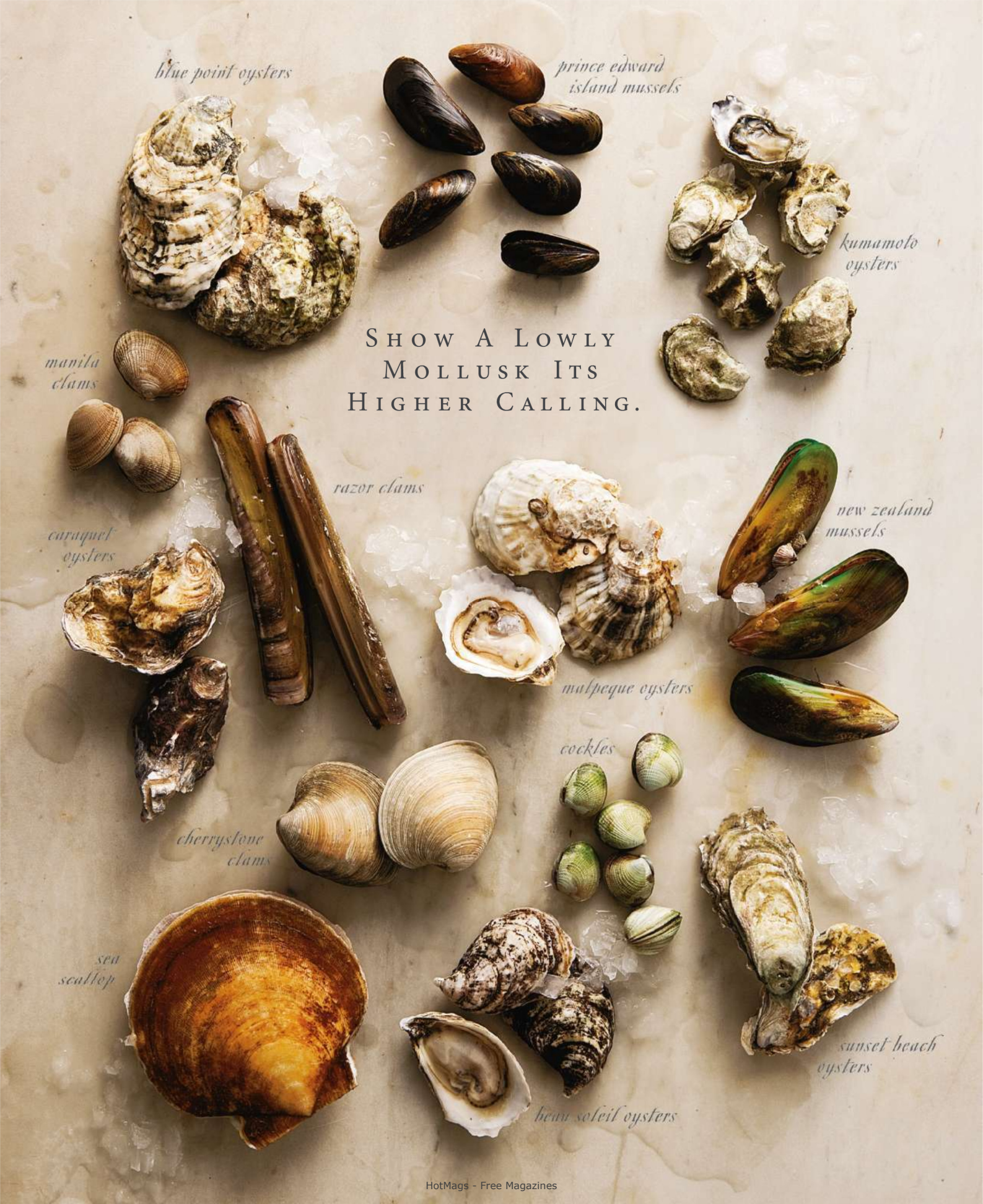

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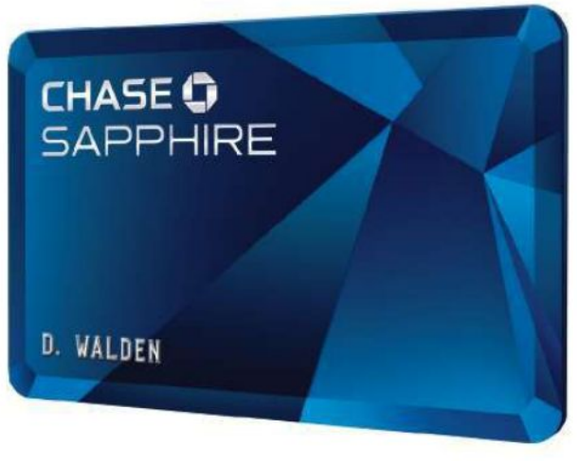

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SPECIAL ISSUE

25 GREAT MEALS

WE LOVE GREAT FOOD, but we love great meals even more: the setting and the companionship (or solitude), the cooking and the sharing. For this special issue, we invited some of our favorite writers and cooks to the table to celebrate the best meals of their lives. The result, starting on page 51, is a real literary feast. Dig in.

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TODD COLEMAN

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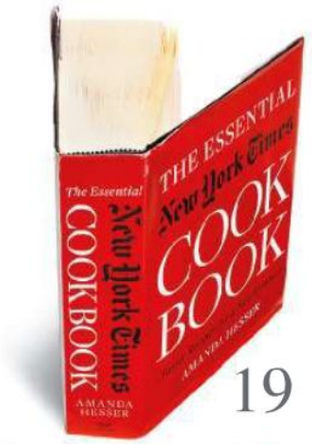
Photograph by Ted Spiegel/Corbis



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Hearty white bean salad, Japanese-style linguine with clams, and creamy crab Sardou at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE132.

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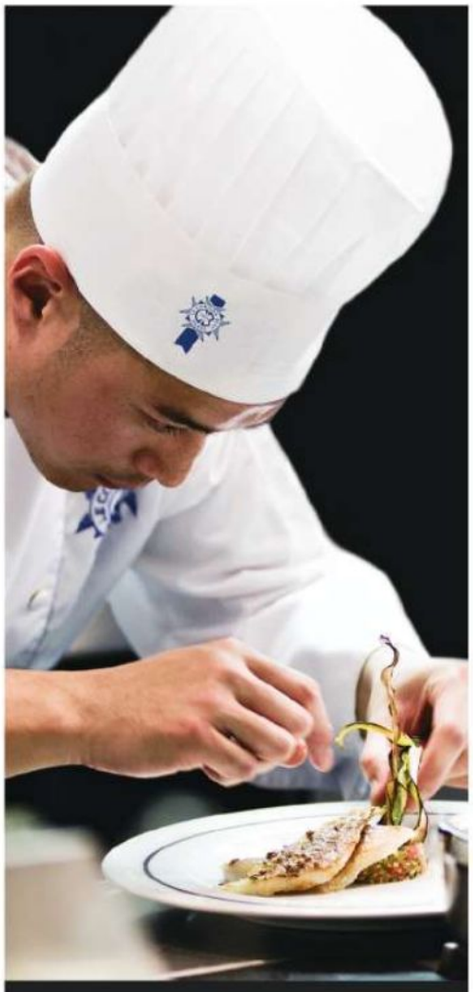

FIRST

Remember When

The greatest meals aren't always the obvious ones

SOMETIMES THE MOST memorable meals take on greatness only in hindsight—after the table has been cleared or, in my case, the fire put out. It was 1991 and I was 25 (see the photo above), newly married, and living in Eugene, Oregon, where my husband and I had moved to help my aunt and uncle run a recording studio. Our first November there, we found ourselves far from other family; the few Eugenians we knew were hippie musicians either boycotting Thanksgiving or eating stuffed Tofurky in their yurts. But I shouldn't make fun. I have my own love-hate relationship with tradition: I decided to bless our new life with a special meal for my aunt, uncle, husband, and me. Instead of turkey, I'd cook an eight-course Thai dinner.

I spent weeks poring over cookbooks. We'd have Thai "boxing" chicken, marinated in garlic, ginger, and cilantro root; pineapple fried rice; a spicy *dong*, or pickle; beef *panang*, with red curry paste; and, of course, Thai iced tea. It was this drink that nearly did my meal in.

While cooking, I poured hot tea into an untempered glass pitcher that I'd absentmindedly set between two glowing electric burners. The glass shattered. Tea gushed everywhere; the burners burst into small flames. I doused the fires, cleaned up the mess, and, since my stove was ruined, pulled out an old Crock-Pot to keep the curry warm. All the while, I silently screamed bloody murder at myself.

Eventually, the four of us sat down to my labor of love. My sweet uncle gave a toast of gratitude for the "unusual" meal. My little family ate every bite. The food was tasty enough, though we all missed the traditional Thanksgiving dishes. (The next year, I roasted a turkey.) In retrospect, my exploding Thai dinner was a great meal for the lessons it taught me: be mindful of others' expectations; don't bite off more than you can chew; and, most important, be grateful, in kind, to loved ones who are grateful for whatever meal you put before them, as long as it's made with love.

Thanks to the writers who tell their stories in this special issue, you'll read about more great meals, each with its own drama, acts of love, and lessons learned. These stories are not just about good food. They're about capturing a time and place (see Carolyn Forché's "The Dinner Party," page 60). They're about those with whom the meal is shared (as in Rita Mae Brown's "Going to the Dogs," page 80). They're even about the unforeseen consequences of eating great meals (Suketu Mehta's "Fire in the Belly," page 62). We hope this issue will inspire you to tell us about your own great meals at SAVEUR.COM /GREAT-MEALS. We look forward to your stories.
—*MARNE SETTON, Assistant Editor*

SAVEUR assistant editor Marne Setton at age 25, outside her house in Eugene, Oregon.

COURTESY MARNE SETTON

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FARE

Tastes and Travels from the World of Food, plus Agenda and More

Coney dogs, Detroit, Michigan's beloved chili-topped franks, at Lafayette Coney Island.

REGINA H. BOONE

Detroit's Top Dog

A wiener worthy of a road trip

WHILE ITS NAME conjures images of the boardwalk in Brooklyn, New York, the Coney dog is as much a part of southeast Michigan as are Model Ts and Motown. I'd known about this wiener style (also called the Coney Island) from the time I was a kid, visiting my grandparents in Grayling, Michigan, in the north-central part of the state, where neighbors who'd migrated from Detroit spoke longingly of their hometown hot dog. Hearing about the fat pork-and-beef frank packed inside a steamed split-top bun and topped with a chili of ground beef, beef hearts, paprika, and cumin; diced raw onions; and bright yellow mustard, I yearned to try one. But these dogs were a rare find that far north of the Rust Belt.

I got by instead with a history lesson. I learned that the regional wiener style was likely invented by Gust Keros, who'd come to Detroit in the early 1900s from Greece by way of New York, where hot dogs were the snack of choice amid Coney Island's beachside amusements. When Keros opened American Coney Island downtown in 1917, he sold his franks dressed in a beanless chili that recalled the meat sauces of his native Peloponnese, in southern Greece. Though

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there are conflicting stories about the dog's genesis, Keros's descendants (members of the third generation run the eatery today) say he got the idea while preparing dinner for his family one night; he topped a hot dog with some meat sauce he was cooking. Seven years later, Keros's brother Bill opened a competing venture, Lafayette Coney Island, right next door.

It was there that I sampled my first, long-anticipated Coney on a trip to Detroit a few years back. I took a seat at the counter and placed my order with a cook who tended a griddle crowded with franks. It's for a good reason it came with a fork. Well worth waiting years for, this well-grilled dog, with its spicy, savory, tangy toppings, was a delicious mess. —*Peter A. Smith*

King of Clams

Sampling the odd yet rewarding geoduck

I'D SEEN PICTURES of geoduck, the world's largest and strangest species of burrowing clam, but until I moved to Seattle last year and found it on my plate at a restaurant called Spring Hill, I had never tasted the luridlooking bivalve. It was hard to believe that this elegant food, with its briny flavor and subtle crunch, served raw and thinly sliced with a lemon-peel relish, came from the same primordial creature.

Frankly, the sight of whole geoduck (pronounced "gooey-duck," from the local American Indian term for "dig deep") can be off-putting. At its most extreme, the mollusk can weigh more than 15 pounds, its wrinkled gray siphon protruding as much as six feet from its oblong shell. Specimens are strikingly phallic, which may explain why geoduck is considered an aphrodisiac in many Asian cultures. Though on the other side of the Pacific it has long been revered as a delicacy, in the American Northwest, where the bivalve is native, geoduck has only recently started showing up on menus, primarily at locavore restaurants. I ate the tender, edible siphon in a ceviche with serrano chiles and green mango at Xinh's Clam and Oyster House in Shelton, Washington, and flash-sautéed with ginger, citrus, and fermented black beans at Matt's in the Pike Place Market. Matt's chef, Chester Gerl, even told me he'd wooed his wife with a plate of smoked geoduck. If this giant clam can lead to love, I thought, I'd better learn how to cook it too.

I figured it made sense to begin at the source, so I turned to Langdon Cook, a Seattle forager who's been digging for clams for 20 years. I could buy live geoducks, Cook said, but the best way for me to become familiar with the mollusk would be to harvest one myself. A few days later I was dressed in neoprene hip waders, sloshing through the ankle-deep tidal water at Hood Canal in Puget Sound, two and a half hours west of Seattle. Cook had told me to look for two-inch oval holes in the muck, and when

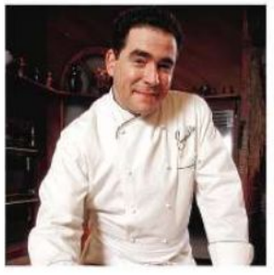
Agenda October

OCTOBER
1–3
SOUTH TYROLEAN SPECK FESTIVAL
Villnösser Tal Valley, Italy
The cold-smoked, herb-and-juniper-cured ham called *speck*, a delicacy of Italy's Südtirol region, is honored at this annual festival. Indulge in dishes such as *canederli* bread dumplings studded with *speck*, attend the crowning of the Speck Queen, and thrill to the competition for world champion *speck* slicer. Information: www.sudtirol.info.

OCTOBER
8–17
DURGA PUJA
Kolkata, India
Feasting is integral to this ten-day festival—celebrated most spectacularly in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal—to venerate Durga, the Hindu goddess representing the infinite power of the universe. Colorful *pandals*, or temporary temples, house stalls that dish out foods like *mughlai paratha* (egg- and meat-filled flat bread), biryani, and fried *bhetki* (silver perch).

OCTOBER
15
Birthday:
EMERIL LAGASSE
1959, Fall River, Massachusetts
Emeril Lagasse began his culinary career as a teenager, working in a bakery in his hometown. He went on to succeed Paul Prudhomme at Commander's Palace in New Orleans, and opened his own restaurant there, Emeril's, in 1990. One of the world's most famous chefs, Lagasse has written 15 cookbooks, has hosted six TV shows, and runs 12 restaurants around the country.

OCTOBER
15–17
NACHO FEST
Piedras Negras, Mexico
In 1943, maître d' Ignacio "Nacho" Anaya of the Victory Club restaurant in Piedras Negras, Mexico, concocted these toppings-laden deep-fried tortilla chips to feed customers while the chef was away. The dish, known by Anaya's nickname, is recognized each year when cooks compete to create the best versions, and the world's largest plate of nachos, which last year measured 84 square feet, is dispensed to the crowd. Information: 52/878-782-1354.



OCTOBER
16
KEENE PUMPKIN FESTIVAL
Keene, New Hampshire
For the 20th year, this New Hampshire town plays host to an extravaganza of all things pumpkin, including pie-eating and seed-spitting contests. Vendors sell a variety of soups, baked goods, and other foods made with the gourd, and in the spirit of Halloween, the festival's costumed revelers attempt to better their annual record for the most jack-o'-lanterns lit at one time. Last year, 29,762 smiling pumpkins lit up the Keene evening. Information: www.pumpkinfestival.org.

OCTOBER
16–18
APPLE FAIR
Vimoutiers, France
This annual fair in southern Normandy celebrates apples, primarily in liquid form. Visitors drink glasses of *cidre bouché* (a champagnelike sparkling cider), the oak-aged apple brandy Calvados, or a Calvados-apple juice blend called *pommeau*. Orchardists present assorted varieties of apple, bakers vie for the best apple pie, and cider makers compete to see whose batch of the stuff is best. Information: www.vimoutiers.fr.

OCTOBER
30
Anniversary:
BUFFALO WINGS INVENTED
1964, Buffalo, New York
According to one popular account, Teressa Bellissimo, proprietor of the Anchor Bar restaurant in Buffalo, New York, invented these Super Bowl staples as a treat for a group of big spenders who were drinking one evening at the bar. Bellissimo split some chicken wings into finger food–size pieces, deep-fried them, doused them in hot sauce, and served them with celery and blue cheese dressing from the salad bar. Today, the Anchor Bar serves more than 2,000 pounds of its signature wings per day.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BEPPE GIACOBBE/MORGAN GAYNIN; NAJLAH FEANNY/CORBIS; FRANZ MARC FREI/ALAMY; PHOTOSINDIA.COM RM 14/ALAMY; OCEAN/CORBIS

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I finally found one with the tip of a clam's siphon poking out, I dug a pit, plunged my arm into the soupy substrate, pulled the clam out, and held it up in the air, Rocky style. My prize was the size of a football with a foot-long siphon, which I turned into gingery sashimi that very night. —*Laurel Miller*

Sweet Spot

This candy store sells oldies but goodies

I'M GAWKING at a bin filled with yellow-and-black-wrapped Hopjes at Economy Candy on Manhattan's Lower East Side when Jerry Cohen, the shop's proprietor, says to me, "I know: your grandmother kept them in a dish." He's spot on. I pop one into my mouth, and its coffee flavor floods me with recollections of my grandmother's apartment, with its staple dish of these old-fashioned Dutch hard candies. This elicits in me what Cohen says is a common response to his inventory: a wide-eyed dash down a sweets-paved memory lane. Surveying the shelves crammed with candies in colorful wrappers, I ask Cohen, "Have you got Razzles? Zotz? Wacky Packages?" Cohen's answer is invariably "Of course!"

The stock wasn't always so sweet at Economy. Back in 1937, when the Cohen family opened a shop on the corner of Rivington and Essex streets, they sold shoes. But the Second World War brought a slowdown in sales, and the Cohens made do peddling chocolate bars on the side: Hershey's, Nestlé, and raisin-and-nut-laced Chunky Bars, which were made nearby at a factory under the Williamsburg Bridge.

Within a few years, the store transformed into Economy Candy. The Cohens carried hard candies, dried fruits, nuts, gumdrops, licorice bites, nonpareils, jelly rings. Chocolate bars sold for five cents each, or six for a quarter. "Candy was easy to get into," says Cohen, 56. "There were six stores on the Lower East Side, and there was enough business for everybody."

Today, Cohen presides over the last of the neighborhood's prewar sweets shops, relocated down the block to a 1,000-square-foot space packed with more than two centuries' worth of nostalgic brands: Hopjes, dating to 1794; thin, pastel Necco Wafers, introduced in 1847; fondant-filled Cherry Mash (1918); peanut butter–and–taffy Abba-Zabba (1922); and the gum-in-candy Razzles, fizzy Zotz, and ad-spoofing Wacky Packages of my

Customers browse for nostalgic sweets at Manhattan's Economy Candy.

Candy Time Line Historic sweets like Hopjes (first made in Holland in the 18th century), Charms (created in 1917 and issued as energy supplements to soldiers during World War I), and the others pictured below are sold at Economy Candy in New York City.

(1794) (1847) (1908) (1914) (1917) (1918) (1921) (1925) (1945) (1952) (1968)

TODD COLEMAN (13)

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childhood in the 1960s.

"I can't compete with the chain stores," says Cohen. "So I sell stuff you can't get at Wal-Mart." While many customers buy in bulk through Economy's website, his most loyal clientele still shops in person. "We have customers who knew the store before I was born," says Cohen. They pick up peanut-and-molasses Mary Janes (1914) and Goetze's caramel-cream Bull's Eyes (1918). "They bring their grandchildren; they have a ball." And after all these years, "they're still complaining about the prices." —*Betsy Andrews*

Fierce Potatoes

Valencia's fried-potato apotheosis

Fried potatoes at Casa Montaña in Spain (see page 28 for a recipe).

WHENEVER I travel to Spain, I order *patatas bravas*, the dish of fried potatoes with spicy sauce that's one of the country's most popular tapas. I've had great versions of this comfort food elsewhere, but I've never tasted any quite as mind-blowing as those served at Casa Montaña, a 174-year-old tapas bar in Valencia.

The first time I went to Casa Montaña, two years ago, I was awed by the simple beauty of their preparation: the potatoes, fried to perfection, were crisp on the outside and creamy within. On my next visit, last fall, I asked the owner, Emiliano García, for his recipe. One secret to his delicious version, he says, is that he cooks the spuds, which he's carved into six-sided nuggets, twice in olive oil—once to soften them and a second time to render them crunchy and golden. Then there's the sauce. Most places serve *patatas bravas* with only a chile-spiked tomato sauce called *salsa brava* (fierce sauce), the kind that made the dish famous in the 1950s when this tapa was invented at a Madrid restaurant called Vinícola Aurora. The dish soon caught on in other parts of the country; in the northeast, Catalan cooks added their *allioli*, or garlic–and–olive oil sauce, as a cooling counterpoint to the fiery *salsa brava*.

Casa Montaña serves the tapa with a heaping dollop of each. The tomato sauce has plenty of hot smoked paprika, and the eatery's unusual *allioli* derives its particular whiteness and lightness from the addition of milk to the garlic and oil.

But the real reason behind this dish's greatness, García told me, is the quality of the potatoes, a factor he said most tapas bars overlook. Every three months, García and his son, Alejandro, drive 135 miles northwest to the village of Guadalaviar to pick up a fresh supply from farmer Roberto Soriano. Soriano's spuds are farmed without irrigation, resulting in a concentrated flavor and a dry texture that makes all the difference in frying, García said. As I cleaned

ONE GOOD BOTTLE On chilly autumn evenings, I usually yearn for a warming cognac, that long-aged brandy from the French region of the same name. Lately, I've been reaching instead for gin. **G'Vine Floraison** ($35), a gin from Cognac, France, is distilled from the blossoms of ugni blanc grapes, which happen to be the main variety used to make cognac. To this floral base are added botanicals ranging from gin's signature juniper to ginger and cardamom, which lend Floraison its sweet spiciness. Such a delicate, dare I say feminine gin makes a lovely martini mixed two-to-one with dry vermouth, and it goes well with Chambord or any other fruity liqueur. But I like it best with a splash of Peychaud's bitters; it's a soft, elegant alternative to my usual cold-weather warmer. —*Betsy Andrews*

5 to Try

Cult Favorites

Great niche food magazines

ChopChop *(www.chopchopmag.com)* Featuring kid producers (like 12-year-old Orren, who raises chickens), kid-oriented cooking tips, games, and kid-friendly recipes for quesadillas, Chinese congee, and other nutritious international dishes, this children's quarterly inspires the next generation of cooks.

Cooking Wild *(www.cookingwildmagazine.com)* This quarterly (whose tagline is "Hunt, Fish, Forage, Feast") helps readers cook the foods that they've harvested themselves, with mouthwatering recipes for everything from steelhead salmon sushi to wild turkey *carnitas*.

Culture *(www.culturecheesemag.com)* Ricotta, Gouda, and tome de Bordeaux are some of the beauties featured in this quarterly for cheese lovers. Each issue boasts a cheesy centerfold, plus profiles of cheese makers and mongers, instructions for crafting your own cheese, and recipes for dishes like baked razor clams with Parmesan and ricotta pancakes.

Meatpaper *(www.meatpaper.com)* This meaty journal pairs arty photographs (of models wearing clothes made of meat, for instance) with essays on delicacies like guinea fowl and lamb offal. You can expect to find honest discussion about the ethics as well as the delicious rewards of life as a carnivore.

Whisky Magazine *(www.whiskymag.com)* Tasting notes on new releases of scotches, ryes, and other whiskeys share space with spirited features on such topics as Japanese blends, Kentucky's top bourbon makers, and the art of toasting casks. —*Laura Kearney*

TODD COLEMAN (7)

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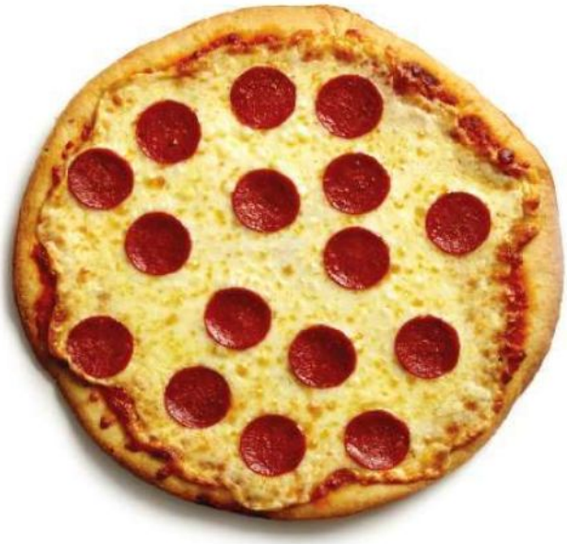


Côtes du Rhône Wines

Always Right

my plate, I couldn't have agreed more. —*David Rosengarten*

PATATAS BRAVAS

Fried Potatoes with Allioli and Chile Sauce

SERVES 2

The key to making Casa Montaña's signature fried potatoes (pictured on page 26) is to poach and then fry them in olive oil.

- ½ cup crushed tomatoes
- 9 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for frying
- 1½ tsp. red wine
- 1 tsp. hot smoked paprika
- ¼ tsp. sugar
- 1 serrano chile, minced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. milk
- 4 russet potatoes, peeled

❶ Make the brava sauce: Purée tomatoes, 1 tbsp. oil, wine, paprika, sugar, and chile in a blender. Season with salt, transfer to a bowl, and set aside. Make the allioli: Vigorously whisk egg yolk and garlic. While whisking, add 1 tbsp. oil in a thin stream until mixture thickens. Continue whisking, adding 7 tbsp. oil in a thin stream. Add lemon juice and milk, and season with salt; chill.

❷ Pour oil into a 5-qt. pot to a depth of 1½"; heat over medium heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 220°. Meanwhile, halve potatoes crosswise. Using a small knife, shape each potato half into a 1¾" x 1" football shape. Transfer potatoes to oil and cook, turning occasionally, until tender and pale golden, 15–20 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer potatoes to paper towels; chill. Remove pot from heat; reserve.

❸ Heat the reserved oil over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Add potatoes; cook until golden brown, 3–5 minutes. Transfer to paper towels; season with salt. Serve potatoes with the reserved brava sauce and allioli.

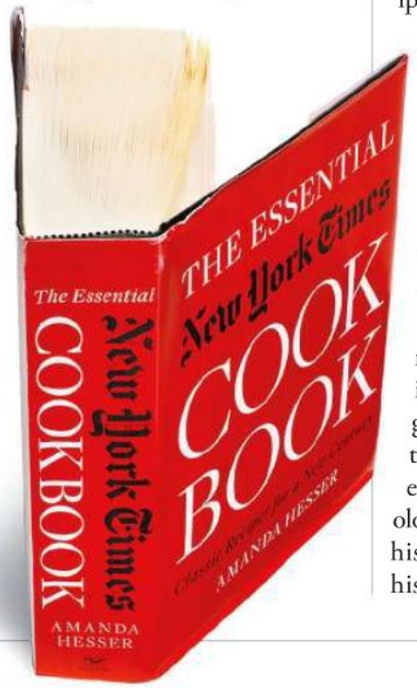
Book Review

Recipes of Record

The New York Times' new culinary opus

LIKE MUCH OF my generation, I started cooking with the help of Craig Claiborne, whose *New York Times Cookbook* (Harper & Row, 1961) offered new dimensions to my food world: Indonesian *sambal*, crêpes Suzette, shrimp rémoulade, and more. This sprawling book, culled from Claiborne's columns for the *Times*, was a best seller for nearly 20 years.

Now, half a century later, when our cooking styles have changed nearly as much as our technology has, *Times* writer Amanda Hesser offers a current perspective on the way America cooks and eats. Drawing on 150 years' worth of dishes and drinks published in the *Times*, she includes well over a thousand recipes in *The Essential New York Times Cookbook* (Norton, 2010). Many were nominated by *Times* readers via e-mail and letters to Hesser (the most frequently requested: a scrumptious plum torte that first ran in 1983) Others were picked by *Times* staff. Each appears with its provenance, and Hesser tested them all.



The result is a tremendously appealing collection of recipes that tell the story of American cooking: some—like lobster rolls or grilled hanger steak—are popular standards today; others are early versions of enduring favorites. It took me two days to cook the okra soup with beef and oysters from 1882, but as the rich aroma of this gumbo rendition filled my kitchen, I was enraptured. I enjoyed preparing a lusty green goddess salad from 1948, as well as reading the salad's history in the recipe's headnote. In fact, many of the recipes can be read for entertainment because of Hesser's excellent introductions. Lots, too, are accompanied by serving suggestions that reveal more of the book's riches: recipe after recipe from *Times* columnists and readers, as well as chefs, presidents, and other luminaries. The serving suggestions for the sprightly chickpeas in ginger sauce (1999) led me to discover a spinach purée (1986) cribbed from Ismail Merchant, a man who was clearly as good a cook as he was a filmmaker.

Flat and chewy chocolate chip cookies from the *New York Times'* new book.

Given its wealth of material, the book's organization is complex. Included is a huge general index, along with chapter indexes; and recipes within each chapter are arranged chronologically, emphasizing the book's historical orientation. Still, the history is imperfect: Hesser has updated many recipes, introducing modern tools and ingredients. Though I wanted to know what the original 1879 recipe for larded potatoes looked like, I understood, when stuffing the spuds myself, why Hesser ditched its unwieldy larding needle in favor of an apple corer. (The original recipes are available on the *Times'* website.) The book strikes a careful balance between upholding an archival mission and delivering solid recipes. No matter how you prefer to cook and eat, you'll find a lot to like inside. —*Nach Waxman*

FLAT AND CHEWY CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 60 COOKIES

This recipe is based on one published in *The Essential New York Times Cookbook* (Norton, 2010).

- 2 cups flour
- 1 scant tbsp. kosher salt
- 1¼ tsp. baking soda
- 1½ cups packed light brown sugar
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 12 oz. finely shaved bittersweet chocolate
- 8 oz. finely ground walnuts

❶ Whisk flour, salt, and baking soda in a bowl; set aside. In a bowl, beat sugars and butter with a mixer on medium speed until fluffy, 1–2 minutes. Beat in eggs one at a time; beat in vanilla. Add reserved flour mixture, chocolate, and nuts; mix until just combined; chill.

❷ Heat oven to 325°. Divide dough into 1-tbsp. portions; roll into balls, transfer to parchment paper–lined baking sheets spaced 3" apart, and flatten. Bake until set, about 15 minutes.

THE PANTRY, *page 115: Information on where to eat Coney Dogs; purchasing geoduck, sweets from Economy Candy, and G'Vine Floraison; and visiting Casa Montaña.*

FROM LEFT: MICHAEL KRAUS; TODD COLEMAN

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ROUTES

Midwestern Charm

An Ohio road trip leads to some of the country's best Eastern European fare—and more

BY JANE AND MICHAEL STERN PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD COLEMAN

We love driving around Northeast Ohio. Sure, there are prettier places on the planet, but a road trip from the shores of Lake Erie around Cleveland south to Rubber City (a k a Akron) and Canton is, in our opinion, one of the finest a food lover can take in all of America. Here's why: having spent the past 30 years seeking out great meals across the country for our *Roadfood* books, we've watched way too many local traditions and ethnic enclaves slip away. Not in this part of Ohio, though, where the spectacularly good cooking reflects many of the local inhabitants' Central and Eastern European roots.

A century ago, 75 percent of Cleveland's residents were either foreign-born or first-generation Americans; the city boasted the largest urban Slovak population outside of Slovakia and the largest community of Hungarians outside of Budapest. Nowadays, Cleveland is more mixed, and that has worked to the local food culture's advantage. On our most recent trip to the area, in May, we encountered not only fabulous old-world specialties, like homemade smoked meats and Serbian-style fried chicken, but also standout soul food, an unforgettable Midwestern church supper, and the best ice cream sundae this side of Iowa.

It's a feat to get out of Cleveland with any appetite at all if you spend time grazing around the city's sprawling, century-old West Side Market, where temptations include the Westside Market Cafe's fried fresh walleye sandwich and Reilly Irish Bakery's triple-chocolate, six-pint Guinness Stout cake, not to mention a plethora of fresh produce, stone-hearth breads, and German kuchen (fruit- and cheese-filled pastries). Another challenge to leaving Cleveland hungry is the Polish Boy, a local soul food sandwich comprising a hot dog bun piled high with kielbasa, french fries, and coleslaw and slathered with a spicy barbecue sauce. (Try the version at Hot Sauce Williams on Carnegie Avenue.) Then there's the luscious *dobos torta*, eight layers of sponge cake and chocolate buttercream covered in caramel, at Balaton Restaurant.

We could have happily spent another few days eating our way through C-town, but the rest of our tasty route beckoned. Just south of Cleveland, in the city of Parma, we discovered a stretch of stores known as Ukrainian Village; it looks like any broad, well-kept Midwestern street until you spot the traditional pastries in the window at Perla Homemade Delights. Perla's sweet cabbage pierogi are legendary, but for those of us demanding instant, sugary gratification, a couple of tables provide space to eat a lovely lady lock (cream-filled puff pastry horn) or sweet nut rolls. Just up the block, we stopped into State Meats butcher shop, where customers line up for the kishka (blood sausage), garlic bologna, and hams that are smoked in the back. We made ourselves a dashboard feast with proprietor George Salo's smokeys (thin, chewy, garlic-packed salami sticks) and vividly spiced hot kielbasa sandwiches stuffed with homemade sauerkraut.

For a sit-down meal that showcases Parma's old-world character, there's no better place than the Little Polish Diner—assuming you can find a place to sit down. With seats for 22, six of them counter stools, the "Little" in its name is no lie. Neither is the "Polish." "Our food is just like mom used to make," the menu advises. We try not to be too resentful for having grown up with moms whose cooking couldn't hold a candle to the special combination plate, which is crowded with a crisp breaded pork chop, stuffed cabbage glistening with sweet-tart tomato sauce, a big serving of *bigos* (pork and sauerkraut stew), and mashed potatoes.

Instead of following Interstate 77 south toward Akron, we took Olde Route 8, also known as the Akron–Cleveland Road, and found another Polish gem, Babushka's Kitchen, where the slogan is "Revive your memories and reunite your family." For those of us just passing through, Babushka's can be hugely frustrating. There are so many good things to eat that even a party of four in which each person orders something different will miss out on house specialties. Do you start with *czernina* soup, that magical sweet-and-sour brew made with duck blood, prunes, and handmade dumplings? Or chicken soup with long, pillowy egg noodles? (See page 33 for a recipe.) Or stuffed cabbage soup? Or tomato dumpling soup? Of course you must have pierogi, but these are so large that two make a meal. Do you have them filled with potato and cheddar? Roasted sauerkraut? Sweet, dry cottage cheese? Among Babushka's special dinners, we highly recommend the Warsaw, a heap of heartrendingly tender roast pork mixed with grilled onions, sauerkraut, and gravy, all sandwiched between two

Top row, from left: Balaton's *dobos torta*; a waiter at Cathedral Buffet; stuffed cabbage at Babushka's Kitchen. Second row: Cathedral's buffet; watermelon at West Side Market; Little Polish Diner. Third row: Taggarts; Barberton chicken, fries, and hot sauce at Belgrade Gardens; a manager at Hot Sauce Williams. Fourth row: George Salo with kielbasa at State Meats; at West Side Market; chicken noodle soup (see page 33 for a recipe) at Babushka's Kitchen.

Contributing editors Jane *and* Michael Stern *are the co-founders of Roadfood.com. Their most recent article for* saveur *was "Modern Icons" (June/July 2010).*

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broad potato pancakes with a crown of sour cream. For dessert: fragile, buttery, fruit-filled pastries called *kolaczki*.

Not all the good things to eat in these parts are Mitteleuropean; if you stop at Cathedral Buffet in Cuyahoga Falls, the fare is steadfastly Middle American. For all of $7, we helped ourselves to an awe-inspiring multiroom buffet, where the cheerfully named "Talk-of-the-Town" salad bar is arrayed with not only the usual lettuce and fixings but also a shimmering many-hued Jell-O mold, butterscotch pudding, and chocolate ambrosia with cream-filled cookie pieces. Turkey Tetrazzini, roasted chicken, and fruit cocktail cake (with canned fruit cocktail baked inside) are home ec masterpieces. Most customers come seeking lunch but also religious inspiration at the Ernest Angley Ministries across the parking lot, for which the buffet is a 1,000-seat mess hall. On our way out, we stepped into the eatery's basement and paid a dollar to see the Life of Christ as depicted in Barbie doll–scale dioramas.

South of Cuyahoga Falls, in Akron, there

MAP BY THE M FACTORY

are two regional specialities that are not to be missed: deep-fried sauerkraut balls and Barberton chicken. The former, tiny tangles of moist sauerkraut and pork, deep-fried to a crisp, you can find everywhere from local restaurants to supermarket deli cases. The latter is a fried chicken dinner (named after the Akron suburb where it was invented) that's always served with an addictive spicy tomato-chile-rice dish called either "hot rice" or, confusingly, "hot sauce." Fried in lard, Barberton chicken is distinguished by the savory flavor of its crisp, bread crumb–coated crust; it also differs from other versions of fried chicken in that the pieces include not only wings, breasts, drumsticks, and thighs but also the seldom-used backs. Legend has it that the dish was created by the original owners of the Barberton restaurant Belgrade Gardens, based on a recipe from their native Serbia, during the Great Depression; the use of the back allowed one bird to yield more pieces, and it also offered more surface area for that wonderful crunchy coating. Requisite side dishes include coleslaw, french fries, and always a bowl of the famous hot rice, recipes for which have been batted around in local newspaper food columns for decades. Belgrade Gardens and other local restaurants like White House Chicken, DeVore's Hopocan Gardens, and Milich's Village Inn all have devotees who swear their place's chicken and hot rice are the best. (We're not taking sides.)

Barberton is also home to Al's Corner

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Restaurant, which serves an impressive workman's lunch on disposable plates. Mild Slovene sausage and pepper–garlic Hungarian sausage come from the owner's own butcher counter at Al's Quality Market, a half-block away. For a side dish, the only reason not to order Al's mashed potatoes topped with a paprika-spiced gravy would be to concentrate on the *haluski,* a butter-rich combination of chewy little *spaetzle* (dumplings) and braised cabbage.

As reporters devoted to the whole truth, we would be negligent not to tell you about the hot fudge sundaes on the other side of Akron, in Canton, at a 1920s-era restaurant and ice cream parlor called Taggarts. Thin, silky house-made chocolate syrup is blended with vanilla ice cream to create a swirly duet that is just sweet enough. What's more, as you spoon into the tulip glass, you'll dislodge a cascade of pecans. It's the nuts that assure this sundae's place in the pantheon; they are salty and roasted to an ecstatic crunch. We couldn't imagine a better way to end our movable feast through the region.

CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

SERVES 8–10

The recipe for this hearty soup (pictured on page 31) comes from Babushka's Kitchen.

- **2 cups flour, sifted, plus more**
- **½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste**
- **2 eggs, plus 1 yolk**
- **8 cups chicken stock**
- **2 tsp. dried sage**
- **1½ tsp. dried thyme**
- **1½ tsp. fennel seeds**
- **5 whole black peppercorns**
- **4 cloves garlic, minced**
- **3 ribs celery, cut into 2" pieces**
- **2 carrots, peeled and cut into 2" pieces**
- **1 large onion, chopped**
- **1 dried bay leaf**
- **1 3½-lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces**
- **2 tbsp. minced flat-leaf parsley**
- **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

1. Make the noodles: Combine flour and salt in a bowl. Make a well in center; add eggs, yolk, and 1 tbsp. water. Using a fork, mix flour into eggs to form a dough. Transfer dough to a lightly floured surface; knead until smooth, 5–6 minutes. Divide dough into 4 portions and cover with plastic wrap; set aside.

2. In a large pot, combine stock, sage, thyme, fennel, peppercorns, garlic, celery, carrots, onions, bay leaf, chicken, and 2 cups water. Bring to a boil; reduce to medium-low. Simmer, skimming off fat, for 1 hour.

3. Put chicken on a plate. Strain soup through a fine strainer into a large pot; place celery and carrots in a bowl. Discard remaining solids. Remove and discard chicken skin and bones. Chop chicken, celery, and carrots into bite-size pieces; transfer to soup.

4. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Working with one dough portion at a time, lightly flour and roll out to 1/16" thickness. Cut dough into ¼"-wide noodles; transfer to floured baking sheet. Repeat with remaining dough. Shake excess flour off noodles; boil until tender, 8–10 minutes. Drain noodles; transfer to soup. Stir in parsley; season with salt and pepper.

THE PANTRY, *page 115: Information on visiting the restaurants and markets of Northeast Ohio.*

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CELLAR

Deep Roots

In the south of France, carignan is tasting better than ever

BY DAVID ROSENGARTEN

Languedoc-Roussillon, the southern French region that sweeps up along the Mediterranean, stretching from the Spanish border all the way to the western edge of the Rhône Valley, is the largest winegrowing region in France—the largest in the world, in fact. Winemaking there has undergone a remarkable transformation over the last 25 years. And of all the grapes grown in Languedoc-Roussillon, none illustrates that transformation better than carignan, a long-underappreciated, bold and spicy red wine variety that is finally coming into its own.

Truth be told, few people wax nostalgic about the old red wines of Languedoc-Roussillon. For hundreds of years, this part of southern France, sometimes called the Midi, was best known for its cheap plonk. Winemakers planted high-yielding vines with the goal of producing mass quantities of everyday table wine. The grape varieties aramon and alicante were always in the mix, later joined by a grape from Spain, cariñena, which came to be called carignan in France.

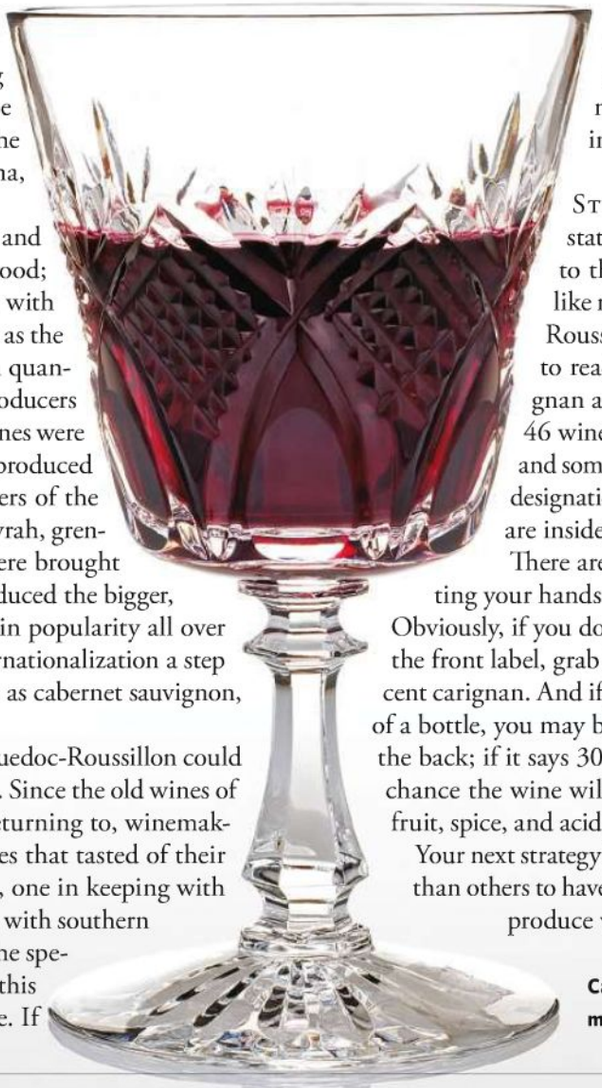
For centuries, the true identity of carignan, and its true potential, were completely misunderstood; it was thrown into the high-volume vat along with everything else. Then, in the late 20th century, as the wine drinkers of the world were turning from quantity to quality, many Languedoc-Roussillon producers decided to get with the times. High-yielding vines were ripped out in favor of high-quality ones that produced less fruit. The Languedoc-Roussillon producers of the 1980s began planting increasing amounts of syrah, grenache noir, and mourvèdre, many of which were brought over from the Rhône Valley, because they produced the bigger, darker, fruitier wines that were then gaining in popularity all over the world. Some producers even took the internationalization a step further, planting such globally trendy varieties as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and pinot noir.

The problem was, the new wines from Languedoc-Roussillon could have been from anywhere, New World or Old. Since the old wines of Languedoc-Roussillon weren't really worth returning to, winemakers in the region interested in producing wines that tasted of their place would have to establish a new tradition, one in keeping with the lean, subtle style of winemaking associated with southern France, one that would make the best use of the specific conditions in Languedoc-Roussillon. And this is where carignan comes back into the picture. If Languedoc-Roussillon had a traditional grape, this was it; it was already known to thrive in the region's hot, arid climate. So a few curious winemakers began taking another look, and they discovered they had a better grape on their hands than they'd ever imagined.

What they came to realize was that lower yields of carignan would produce wines of much higher quality, and that letting carignan stay on the vine until it's fully ripe is the only way to bring out its unique flavor profile. With proper handling, carignan can go from the grape behind dark, dull wine to a grape that produces wine full of cherries and berries in youth and that takes on characteristics of earth, truffles, barnyard, licorice, and spice with a few years of age. What's more, fully ripe carignan has a great capacity to retain its very good acid levels, which means that late-harvest carignan is refreshing as well as complex.

Still, most of the wine that we see stateside from Languedoc-Roussillon belongs to the fruit-bomb genre, made from varieties like mourvèdre and grenache. And Languedoc-Roussillon classifications are infernally difficult to read, making it hard to know what's a carignan and what's not. In this vast region there are 46 wine appellations, numerous sub-appellations, and some 53 different Vins de Pays ("country wine") designations. Most bottles won't tell you what grapes are inside (a reticence that is traditional in France). There are, however, a few helpful strategies for getting your hands on carignan from Languedoc-Roussillon. Obviously, if you do find a bottle that announces carignan on the front label, grab it—it's a safe bet that it contains 100 percent carignan. And if you don't find carignan listed on the front of a bottle, you may be able to find a breakdown of varieties on the back; if it says 30 percent carignan or more, there's a good chance the wine will exhibit that telltale carignan balance of fruit, spice, and acidity.

Your next strategy involves appellations. Some are more likely than others to have older plantings of carignan, which tend to produce wines with plenty of concentrated fruit to



MICHAEL KRAUS

Carignan is at the center of a renaissance in winemaking under way in Languedoc-Roussillon.

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balance the grape's vigorous acidity. My favorite carignan appellation is Corbières, a wild, forlorn place about 60 miles north of the Spanish border. Some call the wines "chunky," but "European rustic" would be a better term for their robust tannins and earthy notes. This is a stronghold of carignan, with many of the appellation's blends featuring as much as 50 percent of the grape.

It's also worth seeking out wines from St-Chinian, in the central part of the appellation. The soil here contains a lot of schist; to reach past that rock to groundwater, the vines send out deep taproots. This ultimately strengthens both the vines and the wines, which tend to be long agers. And because St-Chinian is not as well known as Corbières, there are great values to be had. Faugères, near St-Chinian, is another good bet for round, balanced, full-bodied wines made with a large percentage of carignan.

Minervois is the best-known appellation in Languedoc-Roussillon, but I'm not, as a rule, a fan; too often I see the big-fruit excesses of winemakers on an internationalist tear. But this is far from true of Burgundians Anne Gros and Jean-Paul Tollot, who recently started making wine in Minervois. Their spicy 2008 Les Carrétals is the most exciting carignan I've tasted.

I'm grateful that many Minervois producers haven't been listening to the authorities, who, failing to grasp carignan's potential, have been advising winemakers for the past 25 years to tear out their old carignan vines and plant other varieties. Gros and Tollot's neighbor Nicole Bojanowski, of Clos du Gravillas, decided to plant mourvèdre, syrah, and cabernet when she began making wine in Minervois in the late 1990s. While she waited for those vines to grow, she started playing around with a couple of hectares of old carignan on her property and found that what she'd been told was a garbage grape was capable of producing beautiful wine. Today, Bojanowski and her husband, John, make great wine on one of the region's flagship carignan estates, and the number of carignan-dominant wines produced in Languedoc-Roussillon has grown from maybe 20 to something like 300.

"The region's warm weather and abundant sunshine suit this late-ripening grape very well," John Bojanowski told me recently. "Carignan was adapted to the climate, not the market." For me, it's impossible not to love a grape so stubbornly rooted in its place.

Tasting Notes

More carignans (and carignan blends) are becoming available in the U.S. all the time. Of the many fine bottles I've tasted from Languedoc-Roussillon, the ten below are my favorites. (See THE PANTRY, page 115, for sources.) —*D.R.*

Domaine Leon Barral 2006 (AOC Faugères; $24). Redolent of dried red fruits with hints of herbs and citrus.

Domaine Rimbert, Les Travers de Marceau 2008 (AOC St-Chinian; $15). Bouncy with berry and watermelon fruit from a high proportion of carignan.

Domaine des 2 Ânes, Fontanilles 2006 (AOC Corbières; $16). A carignan-grenache-syrah blend, beautifully balanced, with red fruit and plum flavors.

Clos du Gravillas, Lo Vièlh Carignan 2005 ($19). Extremely pretty, perfectly balanced, with hints of licorice, clove, and leather.

Domaine de Fontsainte, La Demoiselle 2007 (AOC Corbières; $16). This elegant and fruity blend has notes of berries and celery seed, and a firm backbone.

Maxime Magnon, Campagnès 2008 (AOC Corbières; $26). This carignan-grenache noir-syrah blend smells like a fruity white—until rose, lavender, and pine nut kick in. Zappy and refreshing.

Domaine Rimbert, Le Mas au Schiste 2008 (AOC St-Chinian; $15). Made from equal parts carignan, syrah, and grenache, with a gorgeous cherry and leather nose.

Domaine Anne Gros/Jean-Paul Tollot, Les Carrétals 2008 (AOC Minervois; $60). Dark purple, with a spicy-coffee and lilac nose. Succulent, full, delicious.

Domaine Massamier La Mignarde, Expression Carignan 2006 ($21). A supple beauty of 100 percent carignan that demonstrates the best qualities of the grape.

Domaine des 2 Ânes, Premiers Pas 2007 (AOC Corbières; $14). A young, rustic, mostly carignan wine filled with a kind of earthy majesty.

MAP: THE M FACTORY

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In Verona, it's more than a Shakespeare play that keeps the past alive.

As sunset fell on the famous setting of "Romeo and Juliet", we stumbled upon a wonderful restaurant. I asked the owner how he had kept his family's history alive for over four generations. He set a plate of fettuccine in front of me and said, "My great-grandmother's recipe—and Barilla pasta." Needless to say, I was not the first person to experience true love in Verona.

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Barilla Fettuccine with asparagus

Ingredients

Barilla Fettuccine	1 box
Extra virgin olive oil	2 tbsp
Shallots, finely minced	2 tbsp
Asparagus, thinly sliced	2 bunches
Chicken broth	1 cup
Cherry tomatoes, quartered	1 cup
Italian parsley, chopped	1 tbsp

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INGREDIENT

The Beauty of Nori

In Japan, this seaweed is a pillar of everyday cuisine

BY HARRIS SALAT

It exists somewhere between the earth and the briny sea. Papery sheets, crisp and fragrant, lavish with what the Japanese prize as umami—mouthwatering savor.

Nori, the toasty strips of dried, pressed seaweed that wrap raw fish and other delicacies, is the workhorse of the sushi bar. I love biting into a taut hand roll and feeling the green-black sheath snap between my teeth just as my taste buds are awakened by the nori's saline flavor. But nori is the chorus, not the star; it's overshadowed, in its supporting role, by the celebrity of its sushi-grade fillings.

I've studied and written about Japanese cooking for nearly a decade. And I remain amazed by the uncompromising attention to detail that goes into producing foods—from fish to noodles to rice—in Japan.

What about humble nori?

Unlike kelp, wakame, and other forms of edible seaweed that thrive in deeper waters, nori encompasses certain types of algae—colloquially called "seaweed"—that grow in shallow coastal areas. In a process traceable to the 1600s in the city of Edo, now Tokyo, nori was developed by traditional paper makers who applied their craft to press seaweed growing in Tokyo Bay into edible paper. This was used in cooked dishes like soups and eaten plain as an accompaniment to sake. Its standardized dimensions—roughly seven inches by eight and a half inches—have remained unchanged. The dried and toasted sheets became so popular that by the next century, records show a rush of paper makers switching specialties from pressing pulp to processing seaweed.

Today, thanks to modern advances in its cultivation, nori (the word refers to both the plant and the food) is produced in unprecedented quantities in Japan and elsewhere, including Korea and China. Nowhere is it consumed more widely than in Japan. In addition to its service to sushi chefs, nori is a staple of Japanese home cooking. Sheets are brushed with soy sauce and used to scoop up rice at breakfast. Nori confetti is sprinkled over salads, soba and udon noodles, and scrambled eggs. And every convenience store carries nori-wrapped *onigiri*, or rice balls, packaged in an ingenious cellophane sleeve that keeps the rice moist and the seaweed crisp. Versatile in its uses and packed with vitamins, minerals, and protein, it's the most popular of Japan's many varieties of edible ocean plants. The finest nori is cultivated on Japan's Ariake Sea, some 700 miles to the southwest of Tokyo, in an area known for its nutrient-rich waters. So, I decided to head there during the harvest to better understand this elemental food.

On a frigid February morning, I arrived at the home of Yonetsugu Hatada, a nori farmer whom Japanese friends had arranged for me to meet. Hatada's house sits about a mile from the Ariake Sea, in a flat valley checkered with rice fields and greenhouses where strawberries grow. A vigorous 57-year-old with a wrestler's build and a head that's cue-ball smooth, Hatada has farmed seaweed for more than three decades.

"I just picked fresh nori," he said. "Follow me." We entered a prefab building next door, where the briny aroma of the sea hit us as we made

MICHAEL KRAUS

Three types of *yakinori*, or roasted nori, from the lowest grade (left) to the highest (right). *Shin yakinori*'s darker shade indicates superior quality.

HARRIS SALAT's *most recent story for* SAVEUR *was "Native Soul" (August/September 2009).*

our way to two huge stainless-steel tanks filled with a black-green goop—raw seaweed. Hatada pointed to a whirring, 50-foot-long piece of machinery. I scrambled atop the contraption to watch rushing water pour minced nori into molds. Sponges on mechanical arms pressed the seaweed to a papery thinness before a conveyor belt fed the molds into a slow dryer for curing. I rejoined Hatada below, and he told me that this automated equipment mimics the original handmade process. He and his wife share round-the-clock shifts during the peak of the October-to-May harvest season to painstakingly coax this operation along, carefully monitoring and calibrating the soaking and drying times, the thickness of the sheets, and other factors to produce their nori. He pointed to a worn couch in the corner of the building. "This is

EMIKO TOASTED THE NORI SHEETS, DELICATELY WAVING THEM OVER A PORTABLE HEATER, TO GIVE THEM EXTRA FLAVOR AND A SLIGHT CRUNCH

where I nap during the season," he said. He led me to the other end of the huge machine, where bundled sheets were being gracefully spit out into neat stacks of nori, some 2 million sheets of which Hatada and his family, including his wife, brother, and sister-in-law, produce per year. All of it is graded according to when it was picked, and then divided into subgrades based on 100 officially established criteria, such as color, shininess, aroma, and softness.

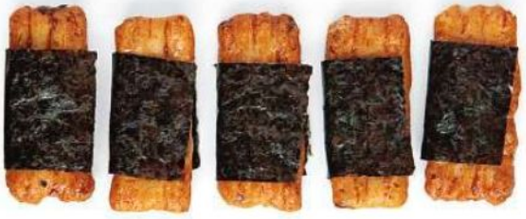
Hatada led me back to his house, where he grabbed two bundles of nori and pulled a sheet from each one. "Our finest and our lowest quality nori," he said. First, he handed me the *shin*, or top-grade, nori; it was satiny and looked like burgundy-colored onionskin. Seaweed thrives in very cold water, Hatada explained,

FROM BOTTOM LEFT: © HORACE BRISTOL/CORBIS, TODD COLEMAN (5)

Nori harvesters wading between rows of the seaweed crops that are cultivated in nets in the waters of Japan's Ariake Sea.

Ways to Use Nori

It may be best known in the States as a wrapper for sushi rolls, but nori's contribution to the table is far more expansive in Japan. Cooks there choose various types (see "The World of Nori," page 42) to lend savory depth to all kinds of food: it's used to season and garnish rice in all forms; cooked in liquid to create sauces for grilled fish and vegetables; and snipped into confetti-like shreds to be scattered over everything from soba noodles to pizza. Below, a few of our favorite ways to enjoy nori. —*Karen Shimizu*



Norimaki Senbei
These salty-sweet rice crackers, flavored with soy sauce and sugar and wrapped in tiny squares of seaweed, are a popular (and addictive) snack.

Japanese-Style Linguini with Clams
This Japanese take on the Italian classic, made with sake-steamed littleneck clams, shiitake mushrooms, and julienned *yakinori*, is our new favorite way to eat pasta. The mushrooms and seaweed lend the umami notes provided by pancetta in the original dish (see SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE132 for a recipe).

Futomaki
Full-size sheets of *yakinori* form the flavorful outer layer of thick *futomaki* sushi rolls. The typically vegetarian fillings can include carrots, dried gourd skins, and thin slices of omelette.

Furikake
As essential to the Japanese pantry as salt and pepper are in the U.S., this ready-to-use spice mix combines sesame seeds, bonito flakes, and nori. Try it sprinkled over warm rice.

Onigiri
Practically every convenience store in Japan sells these hand-shaped rice balls, made with plain or seasoned rice, stuffed with savory fillings like *umeboshi* (pickled plum) or fish roe, and enveloped in or garnished with sheets of nori.

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and this nori had been pressed from tender fronds of the first harvest of winter. Then he gave me the bottom-grade nori, from an autumn harvest. The contrast between the two was remarkable: this one had a noticeably lighter hue, a parchmentlike texture, and none of the sheen of the *shin* nori.

Hatada invited me into the kitchen, where his wife, Emiko, toasted the sheet of *shin* by delicately waving it back and forth over a portable gas heater. Toasting is what gives nori its crispness and its green-black color. Virtually all nori sold to restaurants and consumers has already been commercially toasted; this would be my first taste of hand-toasted nori. Biting into a piece of *shin* nori, I was struck by its crackle, its mere hint of brininess, and its complex umami flavor. It dissolved almost instantly in my mouth. "It just melts," Hatada said approvingly. "The lower qualities, you have to chew more."

Each grade has its culinary purpose, though, Hatada told me. *Shin* nori is coveted by sushi chefs around the world for its softness. Lesser grades are useful at home in everything from soup broths to salads. And while nori is produced by small-scale and large commercial operations in other parts of Japan, Ariake's is considered the best, said Hatada.

"Come with us tomorrow," Hatada said, "and you'll understand why."

The next day, Hatada and his brother, Yutaka, took me to the source. We punched out to sea in their 45-foot fishing boat.

The 700-square-mile Ariake Sea is a huge bay ringed by forested

I WAS STRUCK BY THE NORI'S CRACKLE, ITS MERE HINT OF BRININESS, AND ITS SAVORY FLAVOR. IT DISSOLVED ALMOST INSTANTLY IN MY MOUTH

mountains. When Hatada stopped the boat, the gunmetal-gray waters were as placid as a pond. A 36-square-mile nori field stretched before us, hugging the coast. Thousands of fiberglass stakes poked out of the water in long, orderly rows. Stretched between them were six-by-60-foot nylon nets floating on the surface. Within their webbing, translucent nori fronds rippled beneath the water.

As we took it all in, Hatada explained that rivers running down the mountains spill nutrient-laden sediments into the shallow saltwater sea. Extreme tidal currents—varying by as much as 20 feet—supply oxygen and even more nutrients, creating a rich habitat that has spawned abundant sea life. "Since ancient times the Ariake has been known as the 'treasure ocean,'" Hatada said.

Donning rain suits and balaclavas against the freezing cold, Hatada and his brother climbed into a high-walled dinghy and paddled over to the nets. The little craft was equipped with a seven-foot-wide motorized reel clipper whose spinning blades sent a fusillade of seaweed into the hull. Soon the brothers were standing knee-deep in a sludgy muck that looked about as appetizing as motor oil.

"Here, taste it," Hatada said once they'd loaded the raw seaweed onto the boat. He handed me a few strands of the slimy, forest-green seaweed. "This is the real thing." The seaweed was saline, chewy, and as vegetal as grass cuttings, but I could sense the complex flavors that the finished nori would have. "The best in the world," Hatada said, slapping my back. Then he and his brother jumped back into the dinghy, racing away to harvest more while they still had the tide.

THE PANTRY, *page 115: Sources for the nori described in our glossary.*

MICHAEL KRAUS

The World of Nori

Hundreds of kinds of edible seaweed are harvested in Japan; the ones referred to as nori are from a family of red algae called *porphyra*. Below are those most commonly used in Japanese kitchens. —*K.S.*

Aonori

These delicate flakes of dried, emerald-green algae (shown below) have a powerful mushroom flavor and an earthy aroma. Sprinkle *aonori* over dishes like fried noodles, savory

okonomiyaki pancakes, and steamed white rice, or use it to boost the flavor of soup broth and tempura batter.

Namanori

These dried sheets of untoasted nori (shown below) are deep purple to black in color, springy in texture, and vegetal in taste. *Nama-*

nori, meaning "fresh" or "raw" nori, is the most prized form of nori available: made from the highest-quality seaweed harvested at peak season, it's more expensive and harder to find than toasted *yakinori*. Some chefs toast *namanori* over charcoal immediately before using it in dishes like conical *temaki* hand rolls to give it a crisp texture and smoky flavor.

Iwanori

Iwanori, or rock nori (shown below), is a green algae traditionally harvested from rocks near the mouths of rivers. Sun-dried and sold whole in delicate clusters, it has a concentrated, almost sweet marine flavor and is often added to tangy foods, like salad dressings.

Yakinori

This nori (pictured on page 39) is the most common style, available at supermarkets the world over. The crisp, toasted sheets are used for everything from making sushi rolls to crumbling over pasta. It's also the star ingredient in *tsukudani*, or pickled nori (see page 111 for a recipe). The best versions are smooth in texture with a uniform, dark green color and a lightly smoky and briny flavor; splotchy, reddish, and pale green sheets indicate lesser quality. It's best to keep *yakinori* in an airtight container or plastic bag to preserve its crispness. To achieve the ideal texture, retoast each sheet for a few seconds over an open flame before using.

Ajitsukenori

Ajitsukenori is a nosher's nori. Made of *yakinori* sheets that have been basted with flavorings like soy sauce, sweet cooking wine, and wasabi and precut into ready-to-eat rectangles (shown above), this seasoned nori is great for garnishing a bowl of rice, adding to ramen noodles, or simply eating as a snack.

Aosa

Aosa nori, or sea lettuce, is a green algae that can closely resemble *aonori*, but it's much milder in flavor, and less expensive, too. While its translucent, slightly bitter leaves can be eaten raw as a salad or cooked in soups, it's more typi-

cally sold dried in flake or powder form (shown above). In Japan, *aosa* nori is widely used as a savory seasoning in processed foods like potato chips and rice crackers.

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A syrup for the ages

BY SOFIA PEREZ

You can't tell the story of Spanish food without talking about the Moors—Arabs and Berbers from North Africa who ruled much of the Iberian Peninsula from the eighth through the 15th centuries. Today, there are hundreds of Spanish words that begin with *al-* or *ar-*, signals of Arabic origins. One is *arrope*, a word that comes from the Arabic *rubb* (syrup), indicating the food's luxurious sweetness as well as its lineage. Fresh-pressed fruit juice is boiled until it's concentrated; then it's used as a base in which to stew and preserve fruit. In the farming town of L'Alcúdia, 22 miles southwest of the coastal city of Valencia, Andrés Vallés and his family make their *arrope*—or *arrop i tallaetes* (syrup with pieces of fruit) in the Valencian dialect—with muscat grape must, which comprises the fruit's juice, skins, and seeds. Eight liters of this pulpy liquid are cooked down and strained to make three liters of *arrope* base. In this blackish-purple, velvety syrup, thick enough to coat a spoon, they simmer chunks of pumpkin, though elsewhere in Spain quinces, plums, and other fruits are used, and the syrup might be made from figs or water and honey.

"Arrope is something that everyone's grandmother made," says Vallés, who with three of his brothers now runs Paiarrop, the food company their father founded in 1987. Back when sugar was not widely available or in periods of austerity—such as during the Spanish Civil War—*arrope* was an accessible sweetener, used in desserts and savory dishes or spread on bread. Vallés's father, Amalio, 75, remembers a vendor pulling a mule bearing two large pitchers through town; one contained just the syrup, while the other was filled with the syrup-cooked fruit. Emerging from their homes with empty jars, his customers specified their preferred ratio.

Arrope is no longer widely produced, and that's a shame. With its almost licorice sweetness balanced by tart notes and punctuated by succulent slices of pumpkin, Paiarrop's version is sophisticated and versatile—an ideal condiment for creamy goats' or sheep's milk cheeses, a decadent ice cream topping, and a terrific glaze for roast poultry and meats. An 8.4-ounce jar costs $9.95; contact La Tienda: 800/710-4304; www.latienda.com.

***Arrope* (grape must syrup with pumpkin) on toast with goat cheese.**

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Erin Says:
November 21st, 12:03 am

I grew up baking French bread, and in the last 5-6 years I've really branched out into other kinds of bread. Now my hobby has landed me the title of BOSS OF THE BREAD at our family gatherings. Yes, I'm thrilled to say my bread has achieved the same status as Grandma's stuffing and grape salad. Everybody insists that I bring at least one batch of my poofy, white dinner rolls—then after that I'm free to go nuts! I've surprised them with focaccia, sourdough (my husband's favorite), Irish soda bread and cinnamon sugar yeast bread. This year I'm trying sweet pumpernickel—I can't wait to see what they think of the Bread Boss this year!

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CLASSIC

Grande Dame

Duck à l'orange refuses to go out of style

BY BETH KRACKLAUER

Duck à l'orange (see page 48 for a recipe).

TODD COLEMAN

THE CULINARY EQUIVALENT of flared trousers." This was the dire pronouncement passed upon a plate of duck à l'orange by the British chef Gordon Ramsay back in 2005, on an episode of his reality-TV show *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*. It was a cheap shot. True, a spike in the dish's popularity a generation ago yielded plenty of regrettable renditions. But duck à l'orange—a really good one, with crisp skin, succulent meat, and a velvety citrus sauce that tastes like concentrated sunshine—is a thing too delicious to succumb to the vagaries of fashion.

Indeed, the union of bright, zesty orange with rich duck has retained its appeal (the occasional naysayer notwithstanding) across cultures, continents, and time. The Italians frequently attempt to take credit for inventing the dish and exporting it to France in the 16th century, but less partial sources confirm that some version of roasted duck flavored with oranges was served in both France and Italy long before that. Beginning in the ancient period, likely in Persia, the combination of roasted meats with cooked fruits, and of savory with sweet and sour flavors in a single dish, fanned outward from the Middle East through North Africa and across western Europe.

Why, then, do we think of this dish as belonging to France? The French have, for one thing, proven themselves masters at promoting their national cuisine. Beginning in the 17th century—particularly during the reign of Louis XIV, who matched his imperial ambitions with a determination to establish French art, fashion, and cuisine as the finest in the world—a boom in cookbook publishing disseminated recipes for French dishes, including duck à l'orange, far and wide. A great culinary revolution was simultaneously under way in France, one that eschewed the heavily spiced, sweet-sour dishes of the past in favor of subtler, herbed and butter-lavished preparations. *Canard à l'orange* was one of the few medieval-style, fruit-sauced roasted meat preparations to survive the shake-up, but only with the addition of a generous amount of butter to the sauce. Thus updated, the dish claimed its place in the haute cuisine canon at the very moment it was being established.

That style of classical French cooking would prove remarkably exportable in the decades to come, and duck à l'orange would become an emblem in kitchens around the world of a particular brand of culinary savoir faire. The French chef Marie-Antoine Carême prepared it in the courts of the English Prince Regent and Czar Alexander I of Russia in the early 19th century, only he called it *canetons à la bigarade*. A *caneton* is a duckling—the younger the better when it comes to this dish, many chefs say—and *bigarade* is the French name for the

bitter Seville orange, which makes a beautiful, fragrant sauce with a sour edge that cuts right through the richness of the duck meat. As the Seville orange has a very short season, usually falling between December and February depending on what part of the world you're in, cooks have found ways to approximate the fruit's gutsy sourness during the rest of the year, often by combining sweet orange juice with tarter lemon or lime juice, or vinegar.

By the time disciples of Julia Child were turning out faithful renditions of duck à l'orange in the 1960s, a backlash was brewing. The dish was featured regularly, almost relentlessly, on dinner party and restaurant menus alike throughout that period. The extravagant version served by the chef René Lasserre at his namesake Paris restaurant became so iconic that to this day his recipe, which calls for no fewer than three fruit liqueurs (orange, mandarin, and apricot), is the one provided in the French culinary encyclopedia *Larousse Gastronomique*. Restaurant Lasserre was (and remains, nearly seven decades after its opening) an unabashedly old-fashioned place, all plush upholstery and heavy sauces, and it was precisely this opulent, artery-clogging style of dining that the French chefs at the vanguard of nouvelle cuisine began reacting against in the early 1970s. By 1976, writer Marcia Davenport would even suggest, in the *New York Times*, that "French chefs who hated and wanted to mock their employers must have devised duckling bigarade, an abomination." Ouch.

Like the throngs who still descend on Lasserre and other temples of haute cuisine demanding their *canard à l'orange*, I've never stopped loving this dish, and I'm particularly attached to the foolproof version provided by the cookbook author James Peterson in his book *Glorious French Food* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002). Whereas French chefs typically use bigger, meatier breeds of duck such as Nantes and Barbary, Peterson writes that "we Americans seldom have access to ducks that are suitable for roasting." The variety most widely available to cooks in the United States is the pint-size Pekin (a k a Long Island) duck, which carries an especially thick layer of fat just underneath the skin that must be rendered out thoroughly during cooking, or else you end up with one greasy bird. If you're roasting a Pekin duck whole, you'll often find yourself with overcooked breast meat by the time enough fat has rendered out of the legs to leave them tender and succulent.

To avoid this problem, Peterson suggests cooking the breast and the legs separately. After scoring the breast to expose as much of that fatty layer as possible to the heat of the pan, a dry sauté over medium heat allows the fat to render out, the skin to crisp and brown, and the meat to cook until just medium rare. Perfect. And a nice long braise in chicken or duck stock makes for luscious leg meat, with a quick broil in the oven just before serving to crisp the skin.

The recipe below was adapted from Peterson's, which is elegant and economical in its application of classical technique to the challenge of achieving maximum flavor with the ingredients at hand. Don't have a *saucier* in your kitchen, turning out batches of veal demi-glace that you can use as the base for your *sauce à l'orange*? Simply use the flavorful liquid left over from braising the duck legs and carcass as your sauce's base. Strain that and combine it with orange juice, a little sugar, orange zest, and a splash of sherry vinegar, let it thicken on the stove, and then mount in butter at the end. The result is tangy and rich, subtle and robust all at once, a sauce that even Louis XIV—or a cantankerous 21st-century celebrity chef, for that matter—couldn't possibly quibble with.

DUCK À L'ORANGE

SERVES 2–4

The recipe for this dish, pictured on page 47, is based on one in James Peterson's *Glorious French Food* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002). See page 112 for instructions on boning and butchering duck.

- **1 Pekin duckling (about 5 lbs.), breasts deboned and legs separated from carcass**
- **3 oranges (2 left whole, 1 peeled and cut into segments)**
- **4 tsp. sugar**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **1 medium carrot, chopped**
- **1 medium onion, chopped**
- **5 cups chicken or duck stock**
- **10 whole black peppercorns**
- **4 sprigs fresh parsley**
- **4 sprigs fresh thyme**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **2 tbsp. sherry vinegar, plus more**
- **4 tbsp. unsalted butter, chilled and cubed**
- **Thinly sliced parsley leaves, for garnish**

1 Score the duck breasts: arrange a breast skin side up. Using a sharp knife, make diagonal incisions spaced 1/4" apart through the duck fat without piercing the flesh. Turn the duck breast 45° and cut crosswise incisions spaced 1/4" apart to make a diamond pattern. Repeat with remaining breast; put duck breasts in a small bowl.

2 Using a peeler, peel 2 oranges; juice them into a bowl (you should have about 2/3 cup of juice). Julienne the peel. Add half the peel and 1/3 cup of the juice to the duck breasts along with 1 tsp. sugar; toss duck breasts to coat, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 4 hours or overnight. Set the remaining orange juice and peel aside.

3 Arrange a rack in bottom third of oven and heat oven to 325°. Season duck legs with salt and pepper. Using a cleaver, chop the duck carcass into 3" pieces. Heat a 3-qt. high-sided skillet over medium heat. Put in duck legs skin side down; cook until browned, about 15 minutes. Transfer duck legs to a plate. Add duck carcass to skillet and cook, turning, until browned, 10–12 minutes. Pour off and reserve all but 1 tbsp. duck fat from pan, keeping the carcass in pan. Add carrots and onions to the carcass and cook, stirring, until browned, about 10 minutes. Add chicken stock, peppercorns, parsley, thyme, and bay leaves to the skillet. Bring to a boil; nestle in duck legs skin side up; bake, covered, until duck legs are tender, 40–45 minutes.

4 Transfer duck legs skin side up to a 10" skillet, pat dry, and brush with 2 tbsp. of the reserved fat; set aside. (Reserve remaining duck fat for another use.) Strain broth into a 2-qt. saucepan; discard solids. Simmer, skimming off fat, until reduced to 2 cups, 25–30 minutes. Add vinegar along with the remaining orange juice, orange peel, and sugar and simmer until sauce coats the back of a spoon, about 30 minutes. Remove pan from heat and whisk in butter. Adjust the seasoning of the sauce with more salt and vinegar, if you like. Keep sauce warm.

5 Meanwhile, heat a 10" skillet over medium heat. Drain duck breasts. Brush off marinade, pat dry, and season with salt and pepper. Put duck breasts skin side down in skillet and cook, occasionally pouring off fat, until skin is crisp and golden brown, 20–25 minutes. Flip duck breasts and cook until medium rare, about 1 minute more. Transfer duck breasts to a cutting board and let rest 5 minutes.

6 Increase oven heat to broil; position a rack 8" from element. Broil reserved duck legs until skin crisps, 3–5 minutes. Thinly slice breasts crosswise. Arrange breasts and legs on a platter; pour sauce over top. Garnish with orange segments and parsley.

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TWENTY-FIVE GREAT MEALS

WE ALL HAVE ONE. Maybe it was the first taste of grilled kebabs from a busy street vendor in Istanbul that opened our eyes to the flavor and culture of that city. Or maybe it was something more familiar: a roast beef sandwich that someone special made for us when we were young, or a plate of fried fish we once shared with a good friend. It could be the eureka moment we had at the Michelin-starred restaurant in France or at the local Chinese takeout, or it could just be the refried beans that were always on the family table. The meals recounted on the pages that follow are more than mere experiences; they're symbols of who we are. No matter where they took place or what dishes were served, whether they occurred in a time of war or peace, of scarcity or plenty, they connect us. They remind us of the power of food, the comfort of memory, and the simple fact that every meal we sit down to has the potential for greatness. —*The Editors*

TODD COLEMAN

GREAT EXPECTATION

A chef in pursuit of another Michelin star will do extraordinary things

By Gael Greene

In the early '70s I belonged to a small tribe of American foodies who crisscrossed France twice a year in search of gastronomic epiphany. We were the kind of people who didn't call it spring and fall. We called it mushrooms and game. If Michelin said a restaurant was worth the detour, we braved the back roads. § Here we are, my guy and I, dawdling along a country lane on a route north of Lyon, alerted to a promise of two-star pleasure in Mionnay, a post so tiny it would be easy to hurtle right through it. The restaurant we're seeking, formerly known as La Mère Charles, has recently acquired its chef's name, along with his vaulting ambition. After training under the legendary chef Fernand Point at La Pyramide, the restaurant south of Lyon then reputed to be France's finest, this local boy has returned to Mionnay to take over the family bistro and make his mark. Our car creeps along, and then there it is, the stucco bulk of Restaurant Alain Chapel. The place is ringed with an impressive cluster of chariots—a Jaguar, a trio of Mercedeses, a small utility Rolls—not a parking spot left on a fall Sunday. We pull into the courtyard, a bourgeois patio with tile and greenery.

Inside, the air is buttered with expectation. We claim our table from Madame Chapel, the chef's wife. I invoke the name of friends who are regulars. As a professional restaurant critic, I want to be anonymous, but it never hurts to be anonymous with recommendations. Indeed, the chef himself arrives to take our measure. He is wound up, an actor in the drama of the Michelin stakes, two stars running uphill in pursuit of three. The vibrations of his ambition are like electricity in the room. He suggests that locals taking Sunday lunch can make do with the prix fixe, but friends of gourmand friends must submit to divine excess. Off he goes to kill a fatted bird or three in our name.

Immediately, apéritifs are set before us and we are surrounded by aquatic creatures: the tiniest whitebait, crisp-fried with parsley, in a napkin boat; two kinds of shrimp; three enormous oysters; and a sauceboat of periwinkles hiding in their shells. A waiter indicates we should use toothpicks to impale the mollusks. My toothpick breaks. It seems silly, though, to obsess about conquering a little critter when the grandeur of dinner is ahead.

Our table is a giant round before a stone fireplace. The service is exquisite, neither overly formal nor too intimate. And Monsieur Chapel's sensory attack never ceases.

First, a pâté of eel and pike in pastry graced with a two-toned yellow pool: one side is *beurre fondu*—shiny butter essence—the other, matte *beurre blanc*, spiked with chervil. A rush of butter. Then, after a dramatic pause, we confront the chef's celebrated *gâteau de foies blonds à la Lucien Tendret*. I know that all French aristocrats have troubled livers; the noble chickens of Bresse are no exception. Their livers speak of ritual abuse from a diet of rice, corn, milk, and bits of cheese—the better to be molded into a gossamer flan and draped in a silken crayfish sauce with one crustacean as a flame-red banner. The flan melts on the tongue, leaving a hint of brine.

DESSERT STRIKES IN DAZZLING *waves—ice creams and sorbets; a pride of tarts; sublime chocolate cake; miniature pastries.* I MUST TRY ONE OF EACH

The room grows warmer. A quartet of the tiniest birds gives pause to our insatiable hunger with their innocence. A pair of ortolans for each, my first ever of that now forbidden delicacy, lying there feet up. Macbeth hesitates. But Lady Macbeth coolly stabs her rare roasted bird. A rusty geyser stains the cloth. Out, damned spot. The

TODD COLEMAN

Gael Greene *is the author of the blog* BITE *at Insatiablecritic.com.*

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Mushroom cappuccinos (for a recipe, see page 98).

ortolan crunches. Lady Macbeth eats it, bones, and all.

A simple steamed chicken strikes me as a nice change of pace. Indeed, the chef has steamed a truffle-padded chicken to the texture of satin. Then he's gilded the bird with sculpted carrots, potatoes, and turnips and fortified its poaching bath with foie gras, butter, and heavy cream. By its side, trailing a scent of wet earth, a mushroom mélange sautéed in butter with chive, chervil, and parsley. Strange bedfellows, I wrote in my review.

Dessert, excruciating overkill, strikes in dazzling waves. First, a regiment of ice creams and tingling sorbets; I recall a pineapple ice of supernatural impact. Then, a pride of tarts. A sublime chocolate cake. And fruit—raspberries in a small wooden box, and wild strawberries, tiny *fraises des bois*. Bite-size pastries arrive, and inside a faience tureen, homemade chocolate truffles. I must sample one of each. It's my job! And fresh, strong coffee, Costa Rican, the waiter says. All this costs a princely $73 for two. Tomorrow seems too near.

Two weeks after our visit, Michelin bestowed its third star on Alain Chapel. From time to time, over the years, I returned to Mionnay. Chapel went on to develop nouvelle cuisine–accented dishes like his mushroom "cappuccino," a froth of intense consommé with a floating curl of crayfish tail, but he held fast to classic dishes, too, like his calf's ear stuffed with sweetbreads, truffle, and cream. Two months after my last visit in the spring of 1990, I learned that the by-then legendary chef had died of a stroke, at 53. I can still conjure the image of him as he strode into the room—the posture and clip of a samurai, his floor-length white apron flared, a cigarette in his hand—and with it, an explosion of sensuous memories.

The Family Reunion

A meal is flavored with the past and future

By Peter Balakian

I'm recalling a Sunday in the late 1970s when I was home from graduate school and the two sides of my family arrived at my parents' house in Tenafly, New Jersey, bearing dishes for a big meal. My parents, sisters and brother, cousins and aunts and uncle and I sat around the oval walnut table in the dining room, sunlight on the yellow walls.

My family originates from far corners of historic Armenia in the former Ottoman Empire, which today is Turkey. My mother's side, the Aroosians, is from Diarbekir, an ancient city in southeast Anatolia—dry, dramatic highlands through which the Tigris River runs. My father's family is from the Byzantine capital, Constantinople (now Istanbul), spread across the Bosporus strait, where Asia meets Europe.

Such families never would have met, let alone married, had a great diaspora not occurred after more than a million Armenians were slaughtered by the Turkish government during the Armenian genocide in 1915. When our family got together for this Sunday afternoon dinner, both ends of the Armenian culinary map were represented.

Auntie Anna, my father's sister, a professor of French literature, had brought *mediya*, a Constantinople classic: mussels served at room temperature in their shells with a cinnamony stuffing of rice, onions, currants, and pine nuts. As we pried the shells fully open and ate those tender, tawny mussels, my mother's sister, my Aunt Gladys, a Wall Street businesswoman, brought out her *muhammara*. A walnut dip made with hot and sweet peppers and pomegranate juice, *muhammara* is a specialty of the Armenian and Arab culinary zone that once rolled from Diarbekir south to Syria. We scooped it up with paper-thin pita wedges, and the sensuous sweetness of the mussels played off the earthy, smoldering walnuts.

The next course was *kuefta*, a spiced lamb patty that comes in various shapes and flavors as it migrates from Anatolia to the Levant; the *kuefta* of southeast Anatolia, by my senses the best, was new to the Constantinople half of the family. Bulgur and ground lamb are worked by nimble hands into elliptical shells about the size of a hamburger. A stuffing of lamb, onions, and parsley is sealed within the shells, and then the *kueftas* are boiled. When you lower your fork into one, the juices of that stuffing pop. Next, my mother brought out on a big white platter lamb stew that had been oven-baked with green beans, eggplant, okra, zucchini, tomatoes, fresh parsley, onions, and garlic so slowly that the onions had caramelized and the meat had fallen apart. It was served with bulgur and *madzoun* (yogurt). Every plate was brimming.

Some drank red bordeaux, others beer, but most drank *tahn*—yogurt mixed with water, served over ice with a few mint leaves. I sat watching my family and noticed there was something eerie about this meal. I could hear the tings of silver against porcelain, the clinks of wineglasses, the occasional "Would you pass the platter?" It was odd because this was a family that lived at high decibel levels and was given to opinionated disagreements, enthusiastic expressions of joy, affectionate embraces. But today the food had taken over.

Then my Great-Aunt Astrid, who had spent her childhood in Constantinople, came out with a heaping tray of fish *plaki*. The mild, white halibut filets were cooked with white beans, onions, carrots, fresh parsley, and a fair squeeze of lemon. It was my very first taste of this dish, arriving at a moment when I was beginning to embrace the dishes of my heritage, and it came as a joyous affirmation of roots as well as the new age. To finish it, my mother came out of the kitchen with a tray of *kadaif*, a shredded-phyllo-and-walnut dessert—a classic that spans the length of Armenia.

What struck me that day was how the two poles of Armenian cuisine coming together was an odd emanation of a genocidal history. In its aftermath, such a feast was a small affirmation of a culture's continuity and stubbornness, and of the hybridized creations that give vitality to the New World.

Peter Balakian's *latest book of poems is* Ziggurat *(University of Chicago Press, 2010). He teaches at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York.*

Lifted Spirits

My mother and I sat at a long table under a persimmon tree in Sighnaghi, a village in the Republic of Georgia. I reached for my wine, but our friend Sergo shook his head: not yet. This was my first *supra*, the centuries-old traditional Georgian meal, and I didn't realize that you could drink only after a toast had been made. Sergo went on to make many—to God (sip), to ancestors (sip), to absent friends (sip, sip). We ate heartily and toasted often; tongues were made earnest by wine, hearts were softened by song. Never before had I been so swept up in the sharing of words and food. *—Karen Shimizu*

TODD COLEMAN; ILLUSTRATION: PETER CUSACK/MORGAN GAYNIN

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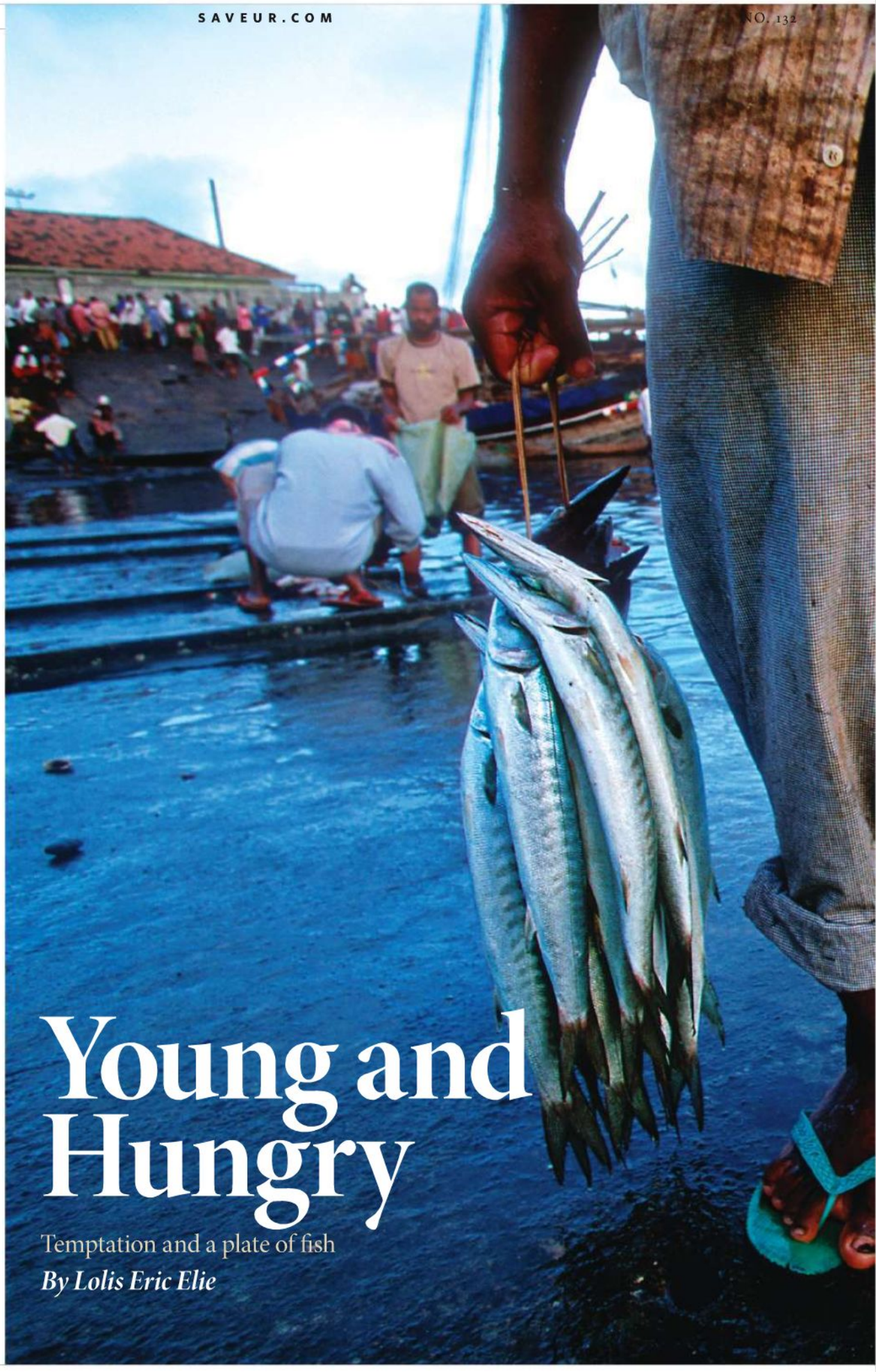
Roasted lamb shoulder and vegetables (see page 100 for a recipe).



Young and Hungry

Temptation and a plate of fish

By Lolis Eric Elie

THE SELLING of seashells by the seashore is a famous profession, though generally not a lucrative one. Our seashell salesman in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, was named Benjamin. (At least I think so.) He had a diversified product line: he also sold "brown sugar" and black-market shillings.

The seashells, he hawked to all who passed. The shillings, he sold quietly. The brown sugar, he sold in a whisper only to those initiated into the illicit joys of pure heroin.

I was traveling around East Africa that summer with Charles, my best friend from college. Our hostel was Luther House, as in Martin Luther, and it was strictly for the budget traveler. Anybody trying to earn a living selling to the Luther House crowd had to be selling something irresistible.

"Hear no stories, hear no lies," my Uncle Roger had told me before I left home. This was the advice I heeded each day as I left Luther House. I spoke politely but kept walking. Charles engaged Benjamin. "How much for the shillings, bro? How much for the sugar?"

Charles had been a teenage heroin addict. He'd gone to rehab, cleaned up, finished his undergraduate degree, and was en route to Harvard's MBA program. That summer, his 30th, he could still remember that I've-conquered-the-world feeling of heroin in his veins. It wouldn't be hard to feel that way again.

AIDS was moving at a full gallop then, especially in poor countries. We had brought our own syringes in case of emergencies, because you never wanted to be at the mercy of a hospital that reused its needles. You see how easy this could be? Charles was likely thinking, I can do this. I can do this right now.

LOLIS ERIC ELIE *is the author of* Smokestack Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country *(Ten Speed Press, 2005).*

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One day, as we were leaving the hostel, Charles engaged Benjamin as usual. It had become friendly banter by then, so much so that Benjamin invited his new American friends to have lunch with him on the beach.

This was not a swimming beach, and lunch would be at no restaurant. This was an open-air fish market. Men sold their catch from a couple of wooden stalls. There was the usual market cacophony of prices being haggled over, fish being hacked, and small, barefoot boys running around, looking for odd jobs or handouts. Benjamin picked out a large fish that looked nothing like any variety I knew from my Gulf Coast fish market. He handed our fish to a woman who was standing over a large pot of boiling oil. He said a few words in Swahili, then beckoned for us to follow him. At another stall, he bought a plateful of rice studded with cinnamon sticks, cardamom pods, and cloves. A few words later, we had a large *paratha*—a flaky flat bread—dripping in butter. A few more words and our fish emerged from the oil, skin bubbly and brown. We claimed one end of a wooden picnic table and sat down to eat. In my memory, the whole feast cost less than a dollar. Charles recalls three times that much.

But no matter the price, it was a magical meal, seasoned by the joy of sharing simple fare with two friends, a few market kids, and a host of flies; seasoned by lemon wedges and the hands we ate with; seasoned by the relief that Benjamin wanted nothing more than company at lunch.

For Charles, the meal was seasoned with another kind of relief, a reprieve from temptation. Back at Luther House, the syringes we'd brought with us remained undisturbed in my backpack.

A fisherman delivers his daily catch to a waterfront fish market on the coast of Tanzania.

© MARTIN HARVEY/CORBIS

LUNCH LESSONS

To a boy in need, a sandwich can mean the world

By Dean Koontz

No lunches or dinners in my life have been more memorable than sandwiches with my uncle Ray Mock, when I was a boy. They were simple fare that he prepared and wrapped in wax paper: sliced chicken breast and Swiss cheese on white bread with crisp lettuce, mayonnaise, and a sprinkle of pepper; cold roast beef on whole wheat with sliced tomatoes and two varieties of mustard. On the side might be pickles or potato chips, or hard-boiled eggs, or sometimes cupcakes. He had probably never heard the words *haute cuisine*, and neither had I. Those sandwiches are fixed indelibly in my memory because of one additional condiment that always came with them: wise and caring companionship.

I was a lonely kid in need of a male role model, of which there could be none better than Uncle Ray, if only because of his humility and unfailing kindness. He had served in Europe in World War II, but he was so modest about matters of courage that he never spoke of his wartime experiences. When pressed on the subject, he would say only, "When you're drafted, whatever you do after is what you have to do, there's nothing you can take credit for." Years later, I learned (not from him) that he'd volunteered.

His wife, Kate, my mother's youngest sister, could be ebullient and delightful one day but sullen and argumentative the next. She was most likely an undiagnosed manic-depressive, and she sometimes belittled and even disrespected him in front of other people. I never heard him respond in kind. He always treated her with courtesy and deference, and if anyone commiserated with him later, he would cut them off and say only, "Oh, that's just Kate, she doesn't mean any of it." He might have had only a high-school education, perhaps not even that, but his common sense in this matter and in all others made him wiser than any graduate of an Ivy League university that I've ever known. Besides, he not only built great sandwiches, but he also taught me valuable, fundamental lessons about food and love.

Although Uncle Ray meant a lot to me, I'm not sure I ever told him that I loved him. *Love* was a suspect word to me when I was young. Because my father was an alcoholic with a tendency to violence, a gambler, a womanizer, and by professional diagnosis a pathological liar, he devalued the word *love* with his behavior. He said he loved my mother and me, but he betrayed us repeatedly. Every time that he lost the mortgage payment in a poker game, he claimed to have done it out of love, hoping to get lucky so that he could give us what we deserved. When he did win, the proceeds invariably were spent on drink and women. As a consequence, I seldom said I loved anyone, until I met Gerda, who became my wife and who, by the nature of her heart, restored meaning and value to the word. Even my mother, who was a gentle and loving soul, seldom used the word *love*, as if the hostile atmosphere in that house caused in her, too, a perpetual allergic reaction, a kind of anaphylactic shock, in which expressions of affection stuck in the throat.

Uncle Ray was a mechanic who worked on Macks and Peterbilts for a trucking company. He was about five foot seven, not heavy but with a sweet round face, good-looking in the way Lou Costello was more handsome than you realized when you were laughing at his shtick—and Uncle Ray always made me laugh. He was a man's man but also the softest-hearted guy I've ever known, not maudlin but sentimental in the best sense. He knew that I was growing up virtually fatherless, and he often took me with him on errands, hours that still shine in my memory, although we were doing nothing more than visiting a hardware store, a dry cleaner, and a sporting-goods shop.

Often he brought with him a big lunch box in a cooler. Partway through the errands, he would find a place to eat—on the bank of the river that passed through our town, on a bench in the memorial park, on the steps of a house that he was building and where I sometimes helped him by doing menial labor. Occasionally, he would take me to his favorite bar and order sandwiches, plus a beer for him and a Coke for me. In a busy tavern where he had friends, his attention remained on me as completely as when just the two of us sat on a grassy bank and watched the river as we had our lunch.

Uncle Ray, a devoted hunter, provided us with much of the meat we ate—but that had a downside. By the time I was 15, I had eaten so much venison, rabbit, and squirrel that I was forever put off all meat with a game taste. To this day, a single bite of even lamb nauseates me, perhaps because I associate the taste with poverty and with the joyless house over which my troubled father presided.

Twice, when I was 11 and 12,

THOSE SANDWICHES ARE FIXED INDELIBLY *in my memory because of one additional condiment that always came with them*: WISE AND CARING COMPANIONSHIP

Dean Koontz *is the author of more than 70 novels. His latest,* What the Night Knows *(Bantam, 2010), will be published in December.*

ILLUSTRATION: PETER CUSACK/MORGAN GAYNIN

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Uncle Ray and I dressed a deer together, which still astonishes me. I am squeamish about blood and can't imagine how I endured that procedure, which is so grisly it's usually conducted in one's underwear. In spite of my antipathy to a butcher's work, and in spite of the fact that I've always known I don't look good in my underwear, Uncle Ray made the experience an adventure, although the memory of it is another reason why I can't any longer tolerate game meat.

When he enlisted me in the dressing of a deer or the beheading and plucking of a turkey, he would make the point that our food isn't just something we buy, that if we don't labor directly to produce it, we need to remember that others do labor to provide it for us and that often their labor is of an unpleasant kind that we prefer not to do ourselves. This is true not just of the food we eat but of everything we need in life, and it's a truth about which we become ever more ignorant as our technological progress steadily distances us from the sources of life's necessities.

In canning season, I rode with Uncle Ray while we collected peach peelings from folks who were putting up fruit for the winter, and I assisted him in his basement when he brewed what he called "peach brandy." The lids on the fermentation crocks needed to be adjusted regularly to relieve excess pressure; otherwise they would blow off, and geysers of peelings and yeasty water would splash across the low basement ceiling. This happened a couple of times, but never when I was present. Uncle Ray once so thrillingly described a 2:00 A.M. fermentation-crock blast that I lobbied (unsuccessfully) to be allowed to sleep in his basement in order not to miss another such spectacle if it occurred.

He allowed me to have a taste of the finished product now and then, but never a full serving. He talked about how a thing could be delicious for a glass or two, but flavorless thereafter, and he told me stories that had nothing to do with adult beverages but that years later I realized had been lessons in temperance, such as the unlikely story of a long-distance runner whose weekly marathons kept him in tip-top shape until he developed an enlarged heart from overexercise and soon after died.

Before making a sandwich, before dressing a deer, before setting out to brew peach brandy, Uncle Ray washed his hands, although not as anyone else might wash theirs. He was self-conscious that even when his skin was red from nearly boiling water and even when the white suds from the soap dripped clean into the sink, the creases of his knuckles were still dark with the lingering traces of grease and oil. They were the hands of a man who worked hard for a living, and what remained after the soap was not grime but instead mere stains, as a printer might be marked by the ink of his presses. He worked at his knuckles with a brush that further reddened his skin, and he might take five minutes at the sink, though after two his hands were as clean as those of a surgeon.

Sometimes I see him in my mind's eye or in a dream, at a sink with brush and soap, and there is something sacramental about his routine and a sacred quality to the memory. He is a good man, humble and kind, scrubbing his hands not just to make a sandwich, but readying himself for an encounter with the divine, which he would never presume that he was worthy enough to have earned. There is a tender truth that I have realized only after decades of living: We are often blind to the fact that we are in the presence of grace, and that whether we are having a sandwich on a river bank or on a park bench, we ought always to remember that maybe, just maybe, we are in the company of saints potential.

Big World

For my 13th-birthday dinner, my parents and I drove from our home in Falmouth, Massachusetts, to Boston to eat at a popular Thai restaurant called the King and I. This was a big deal. We didn't go to Boston often and we'd never eaten Thai food. In small-town Massachusetts at that time, the brick oven pizzeria was as urbane as it got.

The place was bright and loud and packed. The waiter came over and we each ordered pad Thai—enough like pasta to assuage my father, who would rather have been at a red-sauce joint—plus a bowl of *tom yum* soup for me, which I chose because it included shrimp. The soup arrived first, a brown crock of cloudy broth with a few mushrooms, a sprig of cilantro, flecks of chopped something (lemongrass and Kaffir lime leaf, I would later learn), and exactly one pink shrimp. No matter; it was the broth that floored me. It had an unfamiliar sourness that was round and sweet, but it had an intriguing fishy flavor, too, and a beautiful citrusy fragrance. The pad Thai arrived, a teetering heap, tangled with stir-fried egg and scallion, sprinkled with peanuts, all of it strange to me and addictive. I remember looking around to see how the other diners used chopsticks, and then back at my quiet family who twirled our noodles around forks.

After that meal, I'd sit in algebra class and dream of *tom yum*, the memory of its tartness making my mouth water. I'd spend weekends making pad Thai for my friends, once I realized that the "international foods" section of the Stop & Shop carried fish sauce. Our meal made me lust for places like New York City, where surely everyone ate things like Thai food every night. And when I finally moved there—and realized that they didn't—I felt at home anyway. —*Sarah DiGregorio, staff writer at the* Village Voice

TODD COLEMAN

Hot and sour shrimp soup (see page 101 for a recipe).

The Dinner Party

In late January 1984, my husband and I received an invitation to a dinner party in West Beirut, Lebanon, instructing us to come whether or not there was a lull in the fighting, which meant something like "rain or shine." We were to follow the lighted votives set along a certain street until they stopped at our hosts' building, whereupon more votives would be flickering on the stairs to lead us to the right apartment. Our hosts were native Beirutis who wanted to show us an evening of legendary hospitality in a city once known as "the Paris of the Middle East." We were with the press corps, as were many of the other guests. The dinner would be held after curfew, but we had press passes, and those who didn't were willing to venture out through the darkened streets in order to experience the joie de vivre and home-cooked cuisine of the Lebanese.

That night, the sky was crusted with stars and the red lights of tracer rounds. There had been fighting in and around the city for days or weeks or months or years, depending on whom you asked: shell fire, mortar fire, and street-to-street combat. It may seem odd to imagine going out to dinner under those circumstances, but the Beiruti desire to live fully despite everything was contagious. Tonight, "to live" meant to throw a festive dinner. On days when there was even a fleeting respite from the fighting, the streets would fill with marketgoers; umbrellas would snap open over carts piled with tangerines, dates, lemons, and spices, and the street cooks would set kebabs roasting on their grills.

This is how we found ourselves seated on cushions around a table made from carved wooden doors, very wide and long and lighted by dozens of candles. A traditional spread of *mazas*, or small plates, was set before us: cumin-dusted cauliflower served with tahini sauce, lentils in garlic and herbs, skewered lamb that was charred on the outside and pink within, pita bread hot from the griddle, hummus laced with sumac, purées of roasted eggplant and fava beans, and sardines crisped over a fire. Standing among the candles were bottles of Lebanese wine and, later, anise-flavored arak to be poured over water and ice. As the little plates were emptied, they were taken away and replaced by still more dishes. For dessert, we ate a custard resembling an orange-scented cloud.

Throughout the meal there was laughter and conversation, broken by silent, appreciative tastes, and there were also explosions, at first far away, and then nearer to our building. One of the guests raised her glass and pronounced that if the building was struck, she wanted to die very quickly, never knowing what had hit her, to which a Beiruti responded: "Do you not wish to feel everything? Even your own death?" There was a chiming of glasses touched together, more nervous laughter, and when the explosions stopped, we descended the stairwell, again by candlelight, and made our way back into the darkness.
—*Carolyn Forché, author of* Blue Hour *(HarperCollins, 2003)*

TODD COLEMAN

Lebanese *mazas*, including (from left) roasted cauliflower with tahini sauce and *salata adas*, a garlicky lentil salad (see page 104 for recipes).

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Fire in the Belly

A batch of chili proves life-affirming in more ways than one

By Suketu Mehta

ONE NIGHT LAST SUMMER, I made a chile-spiked chili for my family: my parents, my sons, my partner, and her parents. We are all Indian, but while some of us have been steeped in chiles since our births in India, others—like my Chicago-born partner and my Manhattan-born, 15-year-old son—approach the genus *capsicum* with trepidation. Still others just have a God-given affinity for heat. My 12-year-old son, for example, also a native New Yorker, has been enjoying chiles with his breakfast cereal since infancy. It makes me realize that the world is divided not between rich and poor, or male and female, or East and West, but between those who like spicy food and those who do not.

This was an important meal, the first time I was meeting my partner's parents. Her father likes his food spicy, her mother, less so. I decided to make two versions of the chili: hot and hotter. I prepared it carefully, soaking the beans overnight, chopping the onions and garlic, roasting and grinding the spices. I laid the table with soft linen and fresh lilies and bathed it all in candlelight, to lull everyone into a false sense of security, as if they were going to get something European, flavored with nothing stronger than tarragon. It was a warm evening in Manhattan, and I left the windows open to the breeze from the Hudson River.

When the two pots of chili appeared on the table, my younger son smiled, my older son groaned.

"They're very spicy, be careful," my parents warned my partner's parents.

"How spicy can they be?" my partner's father scoffed.

Forewarned, my guests commenced to eat. They began with a taste of the lower-voltage version and then, unable to help themselves, switched to the maximum version. Shouting ensued. Then they took some more and started getting all ruddy and sweaty, laughing excessively and speaking louder than necessary—until they went all quiet and sat back in their chairs, lost in some private reverie, going back to a time of contentment, before the beginning of tragedy, beyond the imagining of loss. A preternatural calm overtook them as the pain-fighting endorphins kicked in, and they lay on the sofa blissed out in an entirely legal high.

Most of the heat in my chili used to come from habanero chiles. Then I discovered the *naga jolokia*. The measure of a chile's heat is called a Scoville unit; a jalapeño has about 8,000, a habanero, half a million. The *naga jolokia*, meanwhile, explodes with over a million Scoville units. In the Indian state of Nagaland, they rub it on fences to repel marauding elephants; the pachyderms smell the chile and wisely run the other way. The heat in the *naga jolokia* was even synthesized in an Indian defense laboratory for use in hand grenades, and in 2007 Guinness World Records declared it the world's hottest chile. In the UK you need proof of age to buy them.

Over the years, I have administered my chili to people experiencing heartbreak, bankruptcy, and depression. Eating it, all other pain in life is put into perspective. It is tasty and happens to be vegetarian, as I have been for some 30 years now. But not for health reasons—not because I want to live forever. I'm vegetarian because I don't like to kill animals. And like many vegetarians, I like my food spicy. This is mysterious to many people, the same ones who also assume that vegetarians must be pacifists and partial to clothes made out of hemp. As a result, I have suffered more tasteless meals than the sins of my previous lives merit.

So this chili is my revenge on all those who would punish me with bland food simply because I want to reduce the amount of suffering on the planet. It is the anti–health food; it should be accompanied with shots of bourbon and profanity.

The evening last summer when I made the chili for my partner and our families was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Everybody got on great, united by their imprecations against the cook. Later that night, though, I woke with a fluttering in my chest. I put my hand over my heart and thought of my uncle who'd died at 34 of heart disease.

When I went to see the doctor, she gave me an EKG. "Your heart is fine," she told me. What I was feeling was probably heartburn caused by the spicy chili I'd made. "But let's get you a chest X-ray, just in case."

OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE ADMINISTERED *my chili to people experiencing heartbreak, bankruptcy, depression. Eating it, all other pain in life is* **PUT INTO PERSPECTIVE**

And there it was: a two-inch spot over my lung, the earliest stage of a malignant tumor. I've never smoked, so I never would have been checked for this. By the time I developed symptoms it would have been too late: 85 percent of people diagnosed with lung cancer die within six months.

Cancer is what happens when some part of ourselves wants to live forever. The body is more a confederation of cells agreeing to act in concert than a single organism. When a cell refuses to die and transmits that obdurate life force to its neighbors, we get cancer—death brought on by the striving for immortality.

As I said, I'm not trying to live forever. But because of the gastric reverberations my chili produced on that night last summer, the cancer was detected early; I had surgery. And now I live to tell the tale.

SUKETU MEHTA *is the author of* Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found *(Knopf, 2004).*

BEPPE GIACOBBE/MORGAN GAYNIN

Classic meatballs (see page 98 for a recipe).

TODD COLEMAN

A Welcome Meal

The meatballs were left on our porch in a Farberware pot with a loaf of Italian bread and a note that said: "Figured you wouldn't have time to cook." We had just moved into our first house and the meal was a gift from our new neighbors, John and Mary, a friendly couple about my parents' age. I remember devouring a plateful on a folding table in our big empty dining room, and telling my husband that these were the finest meatballs I'd ever tasted—juicy and sharp with lots of Pecorino, and winey, just like my grandmother's. The church bells chimed and some cats fought in the yard, and we wondered aloud what life in this small town would be like. Ten years later, I think of that meal often—when I'm cooking some holiday dinner with Mary; when my young son, Jack, asks if Uncle John can make his famous meatballs; or when I come home to find that, once again, our friends have cooked too much food and have left something delicious for us on the porch. —*Dana Bowen*

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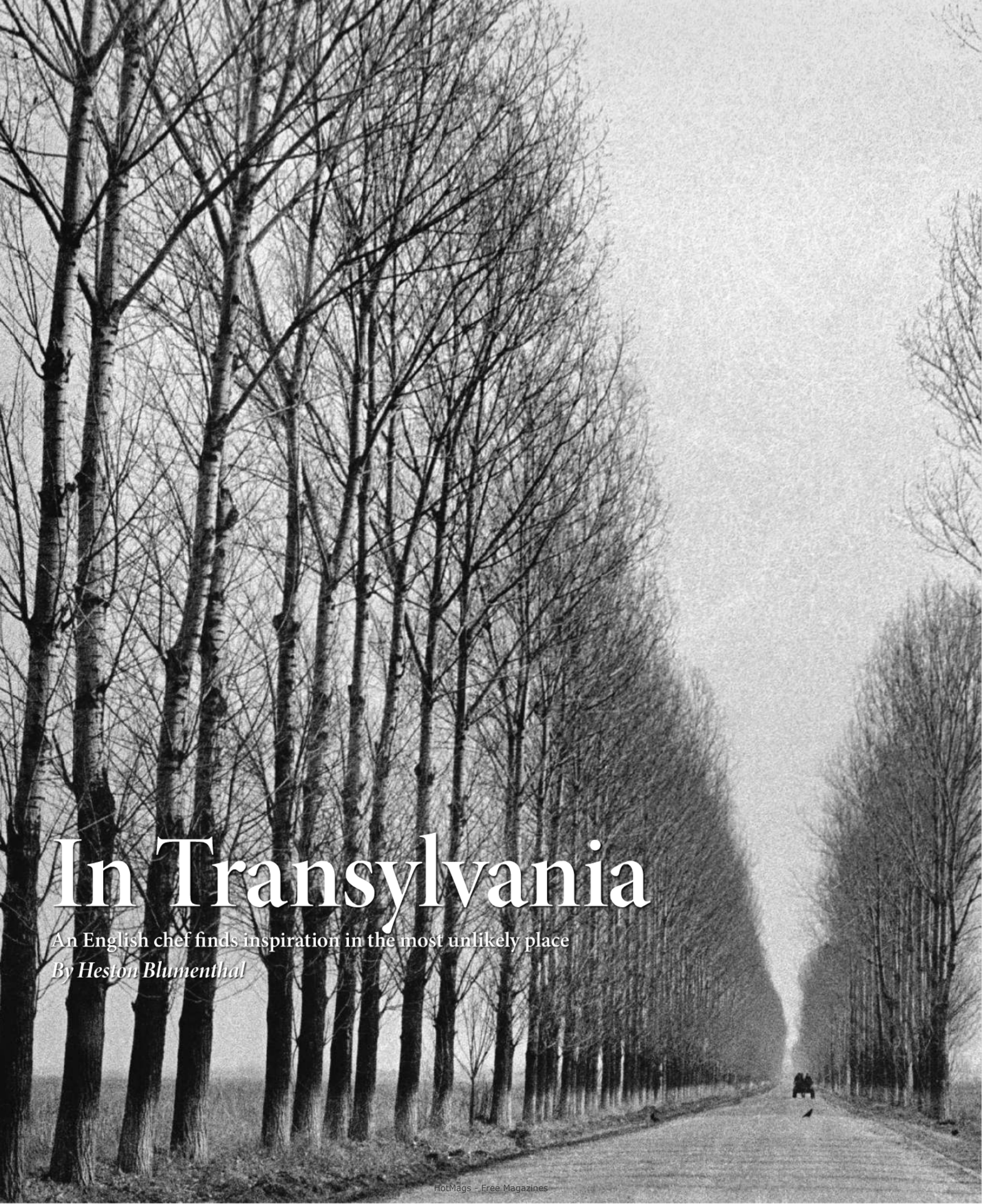

In Transylvania

An English chef finds inspiration in the most unlikely place

By Heston Blumenthal

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A road near the town of Cluj-Napoca in Transylvania, Romania.

© NIKOS ECONOMOPOULOS/MAGNUM PHOTOS

For my latest book and TV show, I'd undertaken to create a series of fantastical feasts inspired by history and literature. This had already led to my boar hunting in the Black Forest for a dish influenced by the Brothers Grimm and bidding at a mushroom auction in Tuscany to develop a recipe that paid homage to Willy Wonka. Now I was in wintry Transylvania in search of something based on Dracula, for a gothic horror feast.

I was on the hunt for dishes made with blood, something suitably vampiric. A museum curator I'd consulted for historical recipes pointed my production team and me in the direction of a Transylvanian village where he knew they'd be holding a pig slaughter and making various dishes with the pig's blood. Our minivan rattled past small roadside villages and along flat snowy plains, until eventually we drove into a large cobbled courtyard. The place seemed almost too good to be true: it was like a set from a horror movie. A toothless grandfather in a moth-eaten flatcap and slippers cackled uncontrollably while brandishing a large ax. Lungs and livers were strung out on a line like so much washing, and a pig's head bubbled merrily in a big pot. Grinning women in thick woollens plied me and the film crew with endless glasses of fiery plum brandy. The patriarch, Gheorghe, stood before a table filled with chunks of raw flesh that he was busy salting and flinging into a bucket. In poorer parts of the world, farmers can't afford to feed their pigs through the winter, so they hold a winter feast during which they kill the animals and either eat them then and there or

Heston Blumenthal *is the chef-owner of the Fat Duck in Bray, England, and the author of* Heston's Fantastical Feasts *(Bloomsbury, October 2010).*

salt them, smoke them, and turn them into blood puddings. I was looking forward to devouring a lot of delicious pig dishes, and I hoped that the blood pudding could be the starting point for a recipe.

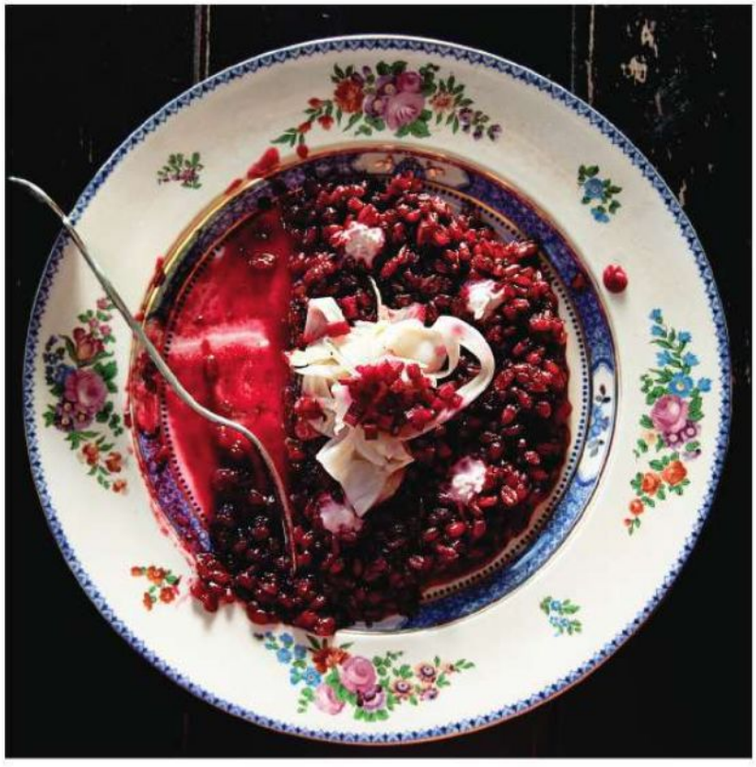
On the way over, my translator had insisted that the Romanians had no knowledge or tradition of Dracula. For them, *dracul* meant "the devil" and that was all. The rest had been invented by Western writers. This was like finding out that Santa Claus didn't exist, and I was so disappointed I decided to get a second opinion from Gheorghe.

That was my first mistake.

Gheorghe's answers to my questions about Dracula became increasingly unsettling. "I don't believe in this foolishness. If you keep God in your soul, no one can have victory over you." His eyes had narrowed. The plum brandy, I noticed, was no longer flowing. I suddenly realized I should have paid closer attention when the translator explained the meaning of *dracul*. In my clumsy questioning I'd managed to suggest that my host was a follower of the devil.

It took a lot of backpedaling and sweet-talking to convince Gheorghe that I hadn't meant what I'd said, but eventually the plum brandy came out again and we trooped inside to enjoy the celebration.

At a long table we sat down to a succession of fantastic traditional dishes. We began with sour soup, a broth made from little more than pig trimmings and cabbage water that nonetheless packed the right sort of rich, fatty punch for a winter's day, especially after we'd grated horseradish on top. This was followed by the *sarmale*: layers of lard, shredded pickled cabbage, smoked meat, and ground pork wrapped in cabbage leaves, all packed into a bulbous amphora-style earthenware pot with a sprinkling of allspice and cooked for two hours.



Spelt risotto with beet juice and horseradish (see page 100 for a recipe).

The food kept coming. Slabs of yellow polenta with mouthwateringly gelatinous slow-cooked pork. A thick stew made with pimentos, onions, liver, wine, spices, and pig's blood. I tried two blood puddings, one of which looked very similar to the dense British version, while the other was more like an aspic or a blood-flavored jelly. Both were tasty, and while they didn't really summon up gothic horror in the way I'd hoped for, by now I was having such a good time it didn't matter. We traded jokes even though we didn't understand each other's language. The plum brandy had continued to flow, and because it would have been bad manners to refuse (and because, I admit, I'm fiercely competitive), I had matched my hosts drink for drink.

That was my second mistake.

Eventually we spilled back out into the courtyard to finish the salting of the pig flesh. Someone handed over a boning knife, and the director encouraged me to chop pig meat as I talked to the camera about the winter feast.

Ordinarily, this would not have presented a challenge. I can multitask in the kitchen, no problem. But a boning knife's not designed for chopping, and the combination of that, the director's questions, and a lot of plum brandy was never going to be a good idea. After a few swift downstrokes I felt a shiver of pain run through me and looked at my thumb, which now seemed to have a gaping red mouth in the middle of it, mocking me and dripping goblets of blood onto the table. I'd taken a deep slice out of it with the boning knife.

I finished the shoot with a thick bandage on my thumb, and though I came back from Romania without the inspiration I'd hoped for, it was all that blood—my own included—that eventually gave me an idea. I realized I'd been thinking too literally. My gothic recipe didn't actually have to have blood in it; it might be more liberating—and safer—to produce a dish that looked gory but in fact contained no blood at all. And so I developed a sticky, savory, full-flavored risotto of the deepest, darkest red imaginable (thanks to a generous glug of madeira and a rich beetroot soubise). To this day, whenever I think back on Transylvania, it's not the amazing food or the local culinary customs that first spring to mind, but the melodramatic shedding of fresh blood.

Edible Art

We laughed at the nutmeg-scented air escaping from the pillow beneath a plate of white bean purée, and at the garnishes arranged like hours on a watch: at one o'clock, a bay laurel leaf–vanilla gel; at nine, a mung bean sprout–sea grape salad. We laughed at the licorice cake—melted with glucose, then frozen and thawed to the consistency of a gumdrop—bobbing atop an antenna. We laughed at the dehydrated bacon swathed in butterscotch and apple leather that dangled from a steel string like a high-wire act. We laughed and devoured it all. Twenty-five courses flowing and ebbing from savory to sweet, from small to large, and back and forth again. On the heels of surviving tongue cancer, Grant Achatz, chef at Chicago's gastromolecular temple Alinea, was inventing dishes with more verve than ever. It was February 27, 2008; I have the keepsake menu. With its swooping design of dusty circles denoting each dish and its elliptical phrasing ("CHOCOLATE, egg, pomelo, smoke"), it reads like poetry and looks like art, a map to the singular journey of that meal. —*Betsy Andrews*

TODD COLEMAN; ILLUSTRATION: BEPPE GIACOBBE/MORGAN GAYNIN

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Happy Birthday, at Last

How stone crab saved me from a lifetime of annual disappointments

By Francine Prose

If, as Tolstoy wrote, every happy family is alike, he forgot to mention that every happy family can screw up birthdays in different ways. If you multiply the number of people in our happy family (me; my husband, Howie; our two sons, Bruno and Leon) by, let's say, 20 years, you get 80 ways of differentiating ourselves from every other happy family having a crappy time on each of those happy occasions.

I came to the party with baggage. I was born on April Fools' Day. Somewhere there is a home movie of me, at two, blowing out the candles on a cake shaped like a lamb with coconut fur. I remember great childhood cakes, cakes that I ate with innocent pleasure until I was old enough to learn that the day—the *me day*—was a cultural practical joke. Oh, is it your birthday? I forgot. Ha ha, April Fools'.

Howie had his own annual trauma, his birthday always coming ten days after his loved ones had blown all their money on Christmas. Bruno and Leon were born four years and three days apart, so that no solution to the birthday-proximity problem prevented one kid from feeling the other's day had been more fun. All four of us seem to share a learned or genetic aversion to having "Happy Birthday" sung to us in a public setting.

Now and then, we've gotten it right. Howie's 60th was a surprise that actually worked; all our friends gathered on a winter night in the cozy Airstream trailer that functions as the private dining room of a restaurant called Diner in Brooklyn, New York. Howie was genuinely shocked, and delighted. Each of my sons has had a memorable dinner—a sushi extravaganza for Leon, a steak house blowout for Bruno. Since Leon got married,

Francine Prose *is the author of* Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife *(HarperCollins, 2009).*

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Steamed stone crab claws, a specialty of Joe's Stone Crab in Miami for 97 years.

TODD COLEMAN

four years ago, I've been saying that all I want for my birthday are my daughter-in-law Jenny's chiles rellenos, the best I've ever had.

But as this past April approached, I realized—poor me!—that I was the only one who'd still never had the memorable family birthday.

The solution was simple. I'd kidnap Howie, Bruno, Leon, Jenny, and our three-year-old granddaughter, Emilia, to another city where at least two of the most common party ruiners—someone couldn't get off work, someone had to be out of town—were unlikely to occur.

I said, "How about Miami?"

Leon said, "How about Joe's Stone Crab?"

Large, loud, convivial, a 97-year-old South Beach institution, Joe's is the kind of place about which you might say, "Well, you don't go there for the food." Except that you do. Because the food is amazing.

Joe's is the kind of place about which you might say, **"WELL, YOU DON'T GO THERE FOR THE FOOD." EXCEPT THAT YOU DO.** *Because the food is amazing*

With its no-reservations policy, Joe's insures that you hang out on its pleasant patio, waiting for a table and drinking until, by the time you're seated, the room glows with the lambent golden aura of a glorious wine buzz.

Like their workplace, Joe's waiters are old-school, and they've mastered that old-school waiter's balance between gracious service and dictatorial control. Our guy looked like a bouncer—a grumpy bouncer who, by some miracle, knew precisely what we wanted, starting with the fact that we didn't want to make any decisions. The menu has options, like a decadent crab pot pie, but everyone knew: We were there for the king stone crab claws, steamed and served cold, with the traditional sides—hashed brown potatoes, creamed spinach, and coleslaw.

When the platters of crab claws arrived, it was obvious that 97 years of expertise had gone into preparing those glistening pyramids of crustacean perfection. The claws were tender, juicy, sweet. The meat loosened from its shells with the ideal balance of reluctance and surrender. The marvelous hash browns covered the whole crispy-soft range, and the funny pucker thing that creamed spinach does to the inside of your mouth made me wonder what genius first realized how well it would go with crab. The coleslaw, a hillock of cabbage with tomato-slice bulkheads, was celestial.

Doubtless there are brave souls eating crab at business lunches, but I'm the reticent type who feels that all that twisting and sucking and slurping is best done in the company of close friends, lovers, or blood relations. We took turns feeding Emilia, who loved the crab and potatoes and coleslaw, though not so much the spinach.

Someone must have told someone it was my birthday, but I was so delirious with food and wine and joy that I didn't mind when a candle arrived on a cube of cake and everyone, even the waiter, sang "Happy Birthday." Emilia sang the loudest, and I was glad to think we hadn't passed our birthday problem along to the next generation.

I looked down at the table, and there, as if by magic, were plates of the tangy Key lime pie for which Joe's is justly famous.

"Thank you," I said. "I love you all." I loved the Key lime pie. I even loved the waiter.

Emilia ate all my cake and some pie. Then she said, "Where's the piñata?"

A TASTE OF HOKKAIDO

Kussyaro-ko Lake

EIGHT HUNDRED MILES from the majestic temples of Kyoto, discover another magnificent side of Japan—its rugged and breathtaking Big Sky country, **Hokkaido**. The northernmost main island, it's a region of stunning natural beauty, with towering mountains, picturesque coastlines, lush forests, active volcanoes, rustic hot springs, and some of the world's richest fisheries.

WINTER IS A MAGICAL TIME here. Snow falls almost every day during the cold season, making Hokkaido one of the snowiest places on earth. The capital city of **Sapporo** celebrates this icy wonderland with its annual Snow Festival in February, when some two million visitors descend to gawk at hundreds of snow and ice sculptures, zoom down huge snow slides, and revel at the city's renowned beer gardens.

HEADING OUT OF TOWN, virgin powder and steep mountains mean amazing skiing and snowboarding. Host to the Winter Olympics, the ski mountains here can log a whopping 700 inches of feathery snow a year. You'll find a dozen world-class resorts, like **Niseko Village**, which offers beginner slopes to adrenaline-pumping black diamond runs, as well as telemark and off-piste skiing, all within view of stunning **Mount Yotei**, a perfectly conical, snowcapped volcano.

NESTLED IN THESE MOUNTAINS, too, you'll encounter rustic onsen, or natural hot springs. Nothing is as restorative as soaking in a steaming, open-air bath in the thick of winter. Hokkaido is dotted with countless hot springs, like **Noboribetsu Onsen**, set within the Shikotsu-Toya National Park. Opened in the mid-19th century, it offers eleven kinds of naturally healing hot waters.

HOKKAIDO ALSO BOASTS another precious bounty—its food. In the wintertime, fishermen pull a mindboggling catch from the island's pristine waters, including salmon, tuna, herring, cod, monkfish, scallops, oysters, squid, sea urchin, and giant king crab. This spectacularly fresh seafood is featured everywhere in Hokkaido, from rarified ryokans, or traditional country inns, to tiny mom-and-pops. In the old trading port of **Otaru**—known as "the city of sushi"—you can sample exquisite fare at over 130 raw fish restaurants. In nearby Ishikari village, sitting at the mouth of the Ishikari River where salmon return to spawn, you can try its famous hot pot, featuring salmon, potatoes, and onions bubbling in a hearty broth. And lining the timeless morning market in Hakotadate, where fishmongers man over three hundred stalls, you'll find eateries offering "three colored rice bowls," with crab, sea urchin and salmon roe over steaming rice, as well as the town's signature ramen served with whole crab.

SEAFOOD ISN'T THE ONLY FEATURE of Hokkaido fare. Ramen noodles are also a specialty of Sapporo, which features over a thousand shops offering the town's namesake variety, but theirs is cooked with a rich miso broth, and topped with corn, roast pork and stir-fried vegetables. Hokkaido is also known for lamb served "Genghis Khan" style, that is grilled on a dome-shaped hot plate and topped with a tangy sauce. And the island's rice fields supply over a dozen producers brewing top-notch sake.

FUN, ADVENTURE, and incredible feasts await in Japan's extraordinary far north.

Niseko Village

Kura-sushi in Otaru

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Good Neighbors

Dinner with Iowa's most beloved radio homemaker

By Jane and Michael Stern

CHRIS CRISMAN

TWENTY YEARS ago, we went to southwest Iowa and stayed awhile at the Tall Corn Motel in the town of Shenandoah. We've always had a special fondness for Iowa's cuisine: its cinnamon rolls are peerless; its respect for pork is legendary; it seems to have more great old soda fountains than anywhere else. It was during this visit that we had the best meal of our careers as chroniclers of road food, at the farmhouse of Evelyn Birkby, radio homemaker.

In the 1920s, when radio was new to most Americans, the medium was a godsend to isolated farm families in the Midwest, for whom solitude loomed as a daily problem. Radio homemakers were the heart and soul of Shenandoah's 500-watt KMA, which, in those days of uncluttered airwaves, bounced far and wide. To them, *neighbor* was a verb; at the microphone, which was often installed at their kitchen tables, they neighbored on the air, friendly and helpful voices to women starved for company. Evelyn Birkby, who began neighboring in 1950 with a daily show called *Up a Country Lane*, and who continues on KMA today (albeit less frequently), has shared her whole life with listeners. She has delivered encouragement when times were bad; she has discussed the toilet training of children and the decorating of farmhouse interiors; and she has shared her tribulations as a new wife struggling alongside her husband to raise chickens and hogs and to start a dairy farm.

As a young woman who'd turned to radio homemakers herself for guidance, Evelyn came to understand that their ingenuous descriptions of white laundry flapping on the line and fruit pies cooling at the kitchen *(continued on page 78)*

JANE *and* MICHAEL STERN *are* SAVEUR *contributing editors.*

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Iowa homemaker Virginia Miller's "Elegant Pork Chops," baked in a ketchup, molasses, and brown sugar sauce (see page 98 for a recipe).

(continued from page 74) window were the folklore of rural life, and that the recipes they shared were something more than supper suggestions. One day, we heard her tell her audience how to make yeast bread. She began her narration with the tale of a young wife so frustrated because her dough didn't rise that she buried it in the yard. The sun shone that day, the yeast began to work, and when her husband came home for supper, he looked out back and gasped at what appeared to be a fresh grave behind the house.

When we visited Evelyn 20 years ago, she took us to the local pharmacy for lunch-counter ice cream sodas and to her friend Emmy's café to eat fluffy cinnamon buns made with water from the boiled-potato pot. For our last night in town, she invited us to her home for what she billed as a real Iowa supper. We ate at twilight at a table on the screened porch in back of the house, where we could look out at the garden, listen to a family of nesting wrens, and see the equipment her husband, Bob, who worked for the Department of Agriculture, used to report climatic conditions to the United States Weather Service in Des Moines.

As our host, Evelyn spoke with the same familiar intimacy she uses when she neighbors on the air, taking every opportunity to enthrall us with the rural customs that enthralled her. She prefaced the meal by chronicling her trip to nearby Essex to a butcher who'd assured her that the evening's pork chops came from an Iowa pig. The cut, she explained, was what cooks call "Iowa chops," meaning nearly two inches thick. They had been prepared according to a recipe titled "Elegant Pork Chops" from Virginia Miller, a longtime KMA listener and friend who lived in an old farmhouse a half hour's drive from Shenandoah. Miller, Evelyn advised us, was known in the area as a crackerjack cook. Her chops were as tender as pot roast and exceedingly succulent: mighty plateaus of marinated pork, baked in a sweet-sour sauce made of molasses, ketchup, and brown sugar, that vented wisps of sweet porcine perfume when sliced into. With the chops, Evelyn served corn on the cob picked from the Birkby garden, allotting four ears per person. On a big plate next to the bowl of corn were a tub of Promise margarine, a stick of I Can't Believe It's Not Butter!, and a stick of Iowa butter. Also on the side were pickled beets, broiled tomato halves topped with seasoned bread crumbs, a salad tossed with X-Tra Touch Country-Style Dressing (made in Shenandoah) that Evelyn had lightened with a bit of beaten egg white, and a homely but satisfying loaf of seven-grain bread, for which Evelyn apologized: only five grains had been used. To garnish the bread, in addition to the margarines and butter, Evelyn provided honey from Bob's apiary, plus blackberry and currant jelly and strawberry preserves, all from his fruit. The gooseberries in the gooseberry tart were Bob's, too, but the silky orb of lemon chiffon ice cream on top of each warm piece of tart was store-bought, a local brand made from a recipe developed by two ladies in Essex.

We drove away from supper on a two-lane road past methodical rows of corn and along pastures and vales where cattle grazed. The land was softly contoured; the undulation of the pavement made the ride feel like sitting a spell in a gentle rocking chair. We stopped at the top of a hill and shut off the car. A soft rain had fallen, and the air smelled of loamy black dirt. Other than the occasional grunt of a distant pig or moo of a cow, silence reigned.

Friday Lunch

No one hands me a menu. It's just not done on Fridays. Friday lunch at Galatoire's, in New Orleans's French Quarter, starts in the morning, with bourbon milk punch at the upstairs bar. One floor below, a congenial crush of locals clutch cocktails in the foyer. They wait until manager Melvin Rodrigue, in pressed powder-blue seersucker, opens the doors to the dining room of the 105-year-old institution. It's 11:30 A.M.

He guides the crowd to their regular tables. The gentlemen hang their panama hats on brass hooks beneath forest-green wallpaper flocked with fleurs-de-lis, the revived symbol of the city's fortitude since Hurricane Katrina. A table of ladies in dime-store tiaras and serious diamonds toss confetti into the air. Jacketed waiters bear large platters as they weave between bentwood chairs.

One of them, Peter or Homer or John or Shannon, recites the specials and brings, without anyone seeming to have asked, orders of the twice-fried soufflé potatoes, puffed like starchy zeppelins, with a dose of tarragon-scented Béarnaise. Next, a side of fried eggplant sticks. Everyone dabs them in a pile of confectioners' sugar swirled with Tabasco: Creole wasabi.

I feel justified in switching to champagne at exactly noon when the crab Yvonne arrives, dressed for the occasion. A generous pile of sweet lump crabmeat adorned with slices of mushroom, sherry, and butter, it is possibly the finest way to eat this crustacean when cutlery is involved. That dish is swiftly followed by trout amandine, the classic whole fish doused in a brown butter sauce and embellished with toasted sliced almonds. Because it happens to be available, and my dining companions insist, out comes pompano *en papillote* as well. Using two serving spoons, our waiter peels back the parchment as fragrant steam issues forth, revealing boned filets swimming in creamy béchamel and dotted with dainty Gulf shrimp.

More champagne. More soufflé potatoes, mostly as an excuse to mop up the remaining luscious Béarnaise.

Finally, a punch bowl of orange liqueur and brandy is set alight at the table. As blue flames course over slices of orange floating in the alcohol, dark coffee is poured to make *café brûlot* that's darker than the muddy Mississippi. By this time, the decibel level has reached absurdity. Since the curtains have been discreetly drawn across the front window, no gawker holding a cocktail in a go-cup on bawdy Bourbon Street would guess that a genteel riot is taking place within.

And then the three-piece brass band barges in playing "When the Saints Go Marching In." Amid the bear hugs and big red kisses, I was reminded that Crescent City revelry supersedes Southern table manners any day of the week.
—*Shane Mitchell, a* SAVEUR *contributing editor*

TODD COLEMAN

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Trout with brown butter and almonds, a signature dish at Galatoire's restaurant in New Orleans (see page 102 for a recipe).

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Going to the Dogs

A birthday dinner, shared among friends

By Rita Mae Brown

Some people are connoisseurs of food. I'm a connoisseur of kindness.

Each year on my birthday, Mother—Julia "Juts" Brown—would cook whatever I asked for, followed by my special birthday cake. My seventh birthday, November 28, 1951, was a week away.

"Hey, kiddo, what do you want for your birthday dinner?" she asked when I got home from school.

"Fried chicken. But Mom, I want to eat with the hounds."

Long pause. Then she laughed, removing the ever present lipstick-stained Chesterfield. "You'll have to eat on all fours."

"I can sit on a bucket."

Mother leveled her gray eyes and ushered me out the door so we could walk the three miles to visit her sister. Mother walked everywhere, one reason she looked so terrific at the age of 47. Twenty minutes later, having passed horses, some pigs, and a few neighbors, we arrived at Aunt Mimi's house with the wraparound porch. Butch, my aunt's Boston terrier, rushed to greet us, followed by the click, click of Aunt Mimi's heels.

Never did I see my aunt without shoes with some heel, her makeup, her bracelets, her earrings. Everything always matched her dress. Mother was more daring; she might wear pedal pushers in summer, a kilt in winter. I knew, even then, that I'd never live up to those fashion plates.

Aunt Mimi poured us some tea. Settled at the kitchen table, Mother launched her first missile. "Sis, the kid's birthday is next week."

Aunt Mimi, gray eyes like Mother's, leaned toward me. "Seven. Special birthday. I remember mine."

"She wants to have her birthday dinner with PopPop's foxhounds."

A stunned silence was followed with a loud "What? You can't be serious." Aunt Mimi stared at me.

"The hounds and Suzie Q are my best friends," I said. Suzie Q was a Percheron horse.

"Sugar Pie, a birthday is a social event. Sharing it with friends is one of the ways a young lady of quality learns to take her place in society."

"Sis," Mother said, cigarette dangling, "there's lots of time for that."

"Now Julia, be reasonable. I know she loves animals, she has a gift with them, but this is—well, unusual. You indulge your child."

"Come on, you're only a kid once. Make your spoon bread." Aunt Mimi made the best spoon bread in the Mid-Atlantic, I swear. Then, voice low, Mother murmured. "Think of Father."

An agonizing pause followed. Even Butch noticed.

"You're right."

On the walk back home, Mother exulted. "Forty-seven years, and my sister never told me I was right. God, she's impossible, but I do love her."

PopPop, when asked if I could share my dinner with his hounds, gleefully agreed. George "PopPop" Harmon was not a gleeful man, nor was he the father of my mother and aunt, but he was the only father they had ever known. Their blood father, too handsome for his own good, left their mother for a life of riotous living and died young thanks to the same.

PopPop, born in 1894, wiry, intelligent, a good wit, great with animals, had shipped off to World War I. He came back withdrawn, still intelligent but given to drink. He tried to drown his troubles but they knew how to swim. Once my grandmother died, he couldn't hold a job. He made a bit of money entering hunting contests with his hounds.

He might go a few days without drinking, but sooner or later he'd drift off to a bourbon lullaby. His eight hounds kept him alive. After he passed, people told me I'd kept him alive as well.

No one ever criticized my grandfather to my face. Despite his affliction, he was a good man. To Mother and Aunt Mimi's credit they did not deny his difficulty nor hide what wars can do to those who must fight them.

On the afternoon of my birthday, I arrived at the kennel to find a picnic table in the feed room, covered with oilcloth and an arrangement of pinecones and flowers. There we sat, Mother, Aunt Mimi, Dad, Uncle Merle, PopPop, and me, wearing barn coats. The dogs ate their homemade kibble from troughs a few feet away; PopPop had jimmied up a turkey-foot wire fence divider so they wouldn't come over as we ate.

What I wouldn't do for that meal today. Juts's fried chicken. Aunt Mimi's spoon bread with churned butter. Greens with fatback and bits of bacon. Sliced hot red beets. Shredded lettuce with Juts's creamy white dressing. Hot coffee for the adults. Ice cold Co'cola for me (in the South it's Co'cola, not Coke). Sweet gherkins and olives. And, finally, my special birthday cake: a double-layer white cake, each layer thickly covered with homemade vanilla frosting and then chocolate icing. If you got one of the toothpicks that held the layers together, you'd have good luck.

We laughed, we sang. When we sang, the hounds sang. I asked PopPop if I could give them some birthday cake. He said I could, so Mother cut eight little squares, putting them on a paper plate.

Now you would think those hounds would body-slam me for the cake, but I had learned a great deal in my seven years from PopPop. I joined them, made the little "whoo-op" sound he used, and called them by name. Each hound took his or her prize very daintily from my fingers.

When I returned to the table after kissing my friends and getting many kisses in return, I noticed PopPop was crying. Mom and Aunt Mimi were misting up, too. At seven, one can't always consider someone else's position and half the time you don't even know your own emotions, or at least I didn't. But that day, I realized my birthday meal had been for my grandfather as well as for me. And it showed me how kindness truly works.

Rita Mae Brown *is the author of* Animal Magnetism *(Ballantine Books, 2009). She lives, farms, and writes in Afton, Virginia.*

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Author Marc Maron's apricot and walnut stuffing (see page 102 for a recipe).

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The Angry Chef

Every year, I prepare a Thanksgiving dinner for 24 people at my mother's condo in Hollywood, Florida. It is a healing and horrifying event for me, full of joy and spite.

You see, my mother, who has weighed 119 pounds for as long as I can remember, taught me from a young age to be afraid of food. Not all food, but certainly all foods with sugar and fat in them. I think my first word was *Mommy* and my second was *skinny*. Needless to say, she is an awful cook because she doesn't eat anything—not anything that normal people would want to eat.

Despite her hang-up (or maybe because of it), I actually like food. And I like to cook. I started to appreciate cooking in college thanks to a professor who was famous for his dinner parties. He was one of those borderline-inappropriate teachers, full of menace, intelligence, and sexuality. At one of his soirees I'd asked how he learned his craft and he said by reading cookbooks. Then he hit on me. That's it! I was inspired—not to be gay, but to cook. The idea that I could do something giving and seemingly selfless and still be the center of attention seemed magical. So, I started cooking for people (or, as a girlfriend recently accused me of doing, cooking *at* people). That's why I make such a big deal about Thanksgiving, flying in, from New York or Los Angeles or wherever I'm living at the time, to cook the holiday dinner *at* my mother and my extended family.

Last year I went all out. I got to her house a few days before the big meal to start stocking up: fresh-killed turkey, extra turkey parts to enrich the stock for the gravy, potatoes (sweet and regular), cream, sour cream, whipping cream, butter, sugar, flour. I filled my mother's fridge with some of her mortal enemies. She dealt with it. She likes having me there. She'd even had her one knife sharpened and borrowed a carving set.

I refused her help and tried not to be annoyed by her questions.

"Can't we use low-fat sour cream?"

"No."

"Why don't you use half the amount?"

"What's the point? It's once a year we eat like this!"

"Will you make a few Brussels sprouts without butter?"

"Fine. I can do that. Now, please leave me alone. I am *cooking*."

The apricot-walnut stuffing is the key to my Thanksgiving dinner. It is a recipe passed down from my college professor. It is rich and soul-satisfying. It makes an impact. It is talked about. I cook the stuffing outside of the bird.

So, last Thanksgiving, in the crucial moments before serving the meal, I put the stuffing in the oven next door to brown the top. (Mom's neighbors are snowbirds; she has the keys to their condo, and I took advantage of the second oven to prepare double the amount of food.) I ran over to my mom's to strain the Brussels sprouts. I went back next door to find a smoke-filled kitchen. I pulled the stuffing out. It was black and smoldering. I stormed back to my mother's kitchen and said, "We're screwed. Everything is ruined. Send everyone home." She went next door with me and tried to calm me down. I paced around screaming, "What's the point? Throw it away. The whole dinner is destroyed!"

My mother said, "Scrape the burnt off the top. Stop making a production."

I wanted to make a production, the Marc's Thanksgiving Dinner Is Perfect production.

"What do you know about food?" I said. "Who is going to eat this?"

"So what?" she said. "You're being a baby."

She was right. I was being a baby. I pulled some of the charred stuffing off and I set out the food. No one noticed anything wrong. The dinner was a hit. My relatives took huge helpings of mashed potatoes (my fluffiest yet) and commented on the juiciness of the bird. They went back for seconds and thirds of the stuffing. While I savored each bite and every compliment, my mother sat there across the table with her plate of plain Brussels sprouts and some of the charred stuffing.

Halfway through the meal, she said: "You know what, Marc? The burnt top is the best part." —*Marc Maron, stand-up comic and host of the podcast* WTF with Marc Maron, *at WTFpod.com*

TODD COLEMAN

MYSTERY VEGETABLE

Enlightenment at the Chinese takeout

By Daniel Pinkwater

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON MY TO-DO LIST to attain Zen enlightenment, and recently, I did. Who knew it would happen at the tiny table in the bay window of the Golden Wok restaurant in Red Hook, New York, the one that affords a view of the street? § I've known Red Hook since my college days. Back then, it was a tidy little workaday town surrounded by apple orchards and dairy farms, with a bank, a Ford dealer, a hardware store, an agricultural equipment outlet, a dentist. Nothing fancy. Since then, the town has caught up with the 21st century: there's now a bookstore and a multiplex cinema, and where the old Cowhig's drugstore used to be there is the Golden Wok.

This is your usual family-run, six-table, take-out or eat-in Chinese place—at first glance. Maybe at second glance, too. There's the colossal jade plant, the photomural of Hong Kong harbor, but there's something else, too. It's cleaner, and somehow less utilitarian. If you look closely at the faces of the people who are working and eating there, you'll notice that they're all happy. They're relaxed. They're talking to one another. They're talking about the food. They're even walking back into the kitchen, where people are hollering and things are sizzling.

Once you've eaten there a few times, the experience is less like going out for Chinese and more like visiting friends who happen to be spectacular cooks. This has everything to do with the Cheng family, who run the place. The kids are off at the corner table, doing their homework. Robert, the younger son, is a chess shark, and he often has a board set up, waiting for victims.

And there's Gigi Cheng, the mother and the guiding spirit of the Golden Wok, who long ago quit paying any attention to what my wife and I order, instead bringing us what she thinks we need. This is fine with us. I believe she assesses our state of health and our mood, and is practicing medicine without a license. On this particular day—the day of my Zen enlightenment—she brings a slew of light and simple sautéed vegetable dishes to go with our hoisin duck and delicately prepared chicken. There's baby bok choy, mustard greens, hot and spicy cabbage, all prepared similarly, with glistening cloves of garlic, all subtly yet strikingly different. It's a hot day and this food is cooling and energizing. I'm sure there is some conversation, but all I'll remember later is that I moaned with delight.

I am no vegetarian, but I am a vegetable fan—no, a vegetable freak. I came to this late in life, having lived through the '40s and '50s, when—except among certain ethnic groups to which I do not happen to belong—vegetables were treated disgracefully in this country. Now I have seen the light, and the produce section and the farmers' market are the equivalents of grand opera or maybe even religion for me. Gigi knows this. She has seen me eat. So she knows what she's doing when she comes over and says: "I have something special, okay?"

The dish is another stir-fry of a vegetable, a vegetable I've never seen before. Pale green and pliant, it has a flavor somewhere between zucchini and cucumber.

"What is this we're eating?"

"Chinese vegetable."

"What's it called?"

"I don't know the name in English. Eat. It is good for you."

"What's the name in Chinese?" I want to know so I can order it again.

"I forget the name in Chinese." She hurries off to the kitchen.

Sharp autumn afternoon light slants across the street. Now we know perfect happiness. Our dogs are in the car, watching us through the window, counting our every mouthful and calculating their share. People passing in the street wave to us. We wave back with our chopsticks.

Jacky, the older son, comes by, busing tables. He's in high school.

"Jacky, what do you call this?"

"Some kind of Chinese vegetable. My dad makes it good."

"Look, is it a kind of squash? A cucumber? What does it look like before it's cooked?"

He goes poetic. "It's like ridges, like mountains. Are you saving pieces of chicken for your dogs? Can I feed them?"

Kan, the dad, pops out of the kitchen. His expression is always watchful and serene, as though he's surveying some huge enterprise. His manner alone makes us feel like we're in a grand, white-tablecloth restaurant, possibly with live harp music. We could ask him what the vegetable is, but he's not going to tell us. Besides, we don't really want to know anymore. Let the marvelous vegetable remain a mystery. I'm sure we will taste it again the next time Gigi notices that we need it.

DANIEL PINKWATER *is the author of* Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken *and more than 100 other books. His most recent is* Adventures of a Cat-Whiskered Girl *(Houghton Mifflin, 2010).*

Good Things to Come

I'm seven years old, and the yeasty smell of baking rolls hangs heavy in the air at my great-aunts Minnie and Selma's apartment. Soon there will be fried chicken on the table, red potato salad napped with warm bacon drippings, the finest high-summer corn. And then: peach pie with a sprinkling of sugar on top, blackberry pie, and banana cream pie, too, because it's Dad's favorite. And for me—especially for me!—a white layer cake with creamy coconut frosting. This is the special meal my great-aunts always prepare during our annual visit, but this year I'm old enough to anticipate what's coming. And that makes it infinitely sweeter. *—Beth Kracklauer*

TODD COLEMAN; ILLUSTRATION BY PETER CUSACK/MORGAN GAYNIN

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Stir-fried loofah (see page 102 for a recipe).

Street Theater

A CITY AS ANCIENT AND FABLED as Istanbul is a repository for stories and secrets. I suppose it's little wonder, then, that I've ended up basing a series of detective novels upon my years of visits to the city, with its colorful and noisy street life. The abundance of outdoor markets and eateries has allowed me to sit and watch local characters come and go over the years—Ottoman princesses, gun-toting mobsters, rainbow-clad eccentrics. And then there is the fantastic food itself.

I've had countless memorable street-side meals in the years I've been visiting Istanbul, but one stands out in particular. It took place 23 years ago in Çiçek Pasajı (the Flower Passage), on the European side of the city. This elegant, café-lined arcade is today a peaceful spot to dine. Back in 1987, things were different.

It was the first time my husband had been to Istanbul, and we'd been hitting the town hard by the time we arrived in Çiçek Pasajı. The Pasajı was wild in those days, full of soldiers drinking raki, Gypsy musicians, chain-smoking veterans of the 1974 Cyprus War, and ladies of easy virtue. There was no stained-glass roof covering the place then, as there is now, only a flapping tarpaulin. We sat down at a rough wooden table outside a nameless restaurant. I ordered yogurt laced with mint and cucumber; a green bean salad called *fasulye*; and *lahmacun*, a hot, fragrant flat bread topped with a blistering paste of ground lamb seasoned with cumin, cayenne, and chiles. I also ordered *çig köfte*, spiced lamb meatballs, which, being raw, can be a risky choice, but we washed them down with lashings of eye-watering raki while listening to an elderly chanteuse sing Edith Piaf numbers.

When my husband stumbled off to find the waiter, I managed to deflect the attentions of a tire salesman from Damascus (he didn't care that I was married). I ordered more raki, my husband returned, and we were fully immersed now in the scene around us. It was then that I caught sight of *her*: the tallest, blondest, most stunning transsexual I had ever seen. She wore a tight leather miniskirt and stiletto heels. On her arm was a dark, staggeringly handsome man. Later we discovered that the man was an undercover policeman who had just arrested her for soliciting. But for me, if not for her, that moment was meaningful. I didn't know when or how, but I knew I wanted her as a character one day. Years later, she became Samsun, my detective's outré, cross-dressing cousin. Every time I write about her I recall that night in Çiçek Pasajı, and I taste the spice of the *lahmacun* in my mouth. *—Barbara Nadel, author of* Deadly Web *(Headline, 2005) and* Death by Design *(Headline, 2010)*

TODD COLEMAN

Shoppers browsing for olives, cheeses, sausages, and other foods at an outdoor market in Istanbul, Turkey.

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Refried beans with chorizo (see page 104 for a recipe).

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Our Daily Bread

The sustaining power of the ordinary

By Richard Rodriguez

THE GREAT MEALS OF OUR LIVES may be those we are not inclined to remember because they belong to the sameness of our lives. Like my father's refried beans with chorizo, that silky mash.

My father came home from work; he rolled up his sleeves; he stood at the stove. First, he fried the chorizo. After an interval of spit and crackle, he poured on the pinto beans. He mashed the beans with an aluminum potato masher that never left its drawer quietly. The beans were ready when my father banged the masher against the rim of the skillet. It was the only ceremony of our family life that he alone governed, entirely to his own taste.

My mother was romantic, changeable, inventive. She splashed a spoonful of sour cream atop my father's *frijoles* on her plate, for she loved to scoop up the cool and the warm together with a crust of French bread—torn, never sliced.

Whatever else my mother served—chicken marengo from a newspaper recipe, scrambled eggs with green beans, a pineapple and tomato salad, or her winter *caldo* scented with cilantro—my father's beans were always on the table. Thus did my father's reliability meet my mother's dash and wit.

My father had been an orphan in Mexico. After two years of grammar school, he went to work for an uncle who treated him like a servant. Those were years of political turmoil—an anti-Catholic government in the Catholic country. My father remembered seeing a dead priest hanging from a tree in the yard.

Mexico did not love my father. When he turned 19, he boarded a freighter bound for Australia. The ship docked in San Francisco for repairs. My father decided to look for work. He met my mother. The ship sailed away. They married, made four American children who were oblivious to tragedy. My father supported his family by making false teeth. For the rest of his life, he dreamed of the open Pacific.

A childhood, happy or unhappy, is constructed on an assumption that things will always be as they are—the stuffing of the Christmas turkey will be the same as "always," as last year. Family food is ritual, a binding spell. It is prayer, it is magic, it is superstition, it is tyranny. I would have noticed the refried beans only if they'd not been there.

I was too happy a child to wonder if my father's tragic youth had instilled in him a yearning for the repetition his children yearned to escape. Only now do I wonder how my father's work—eight hours of molars and bicuspids, long metal shelves lined with the mockery of false teeth—revolted or sweetened his appetite as he stood at the stove, the masher in his hand, dutiful priest, disappointed romantic. Disappointment! And now, that his son should write his eulogy as refried beans. My father was a brilliant man.

FAMILY FOOD IS RITUAL, ***a binding spell. It is prayer, it is magic, it is superstition, it is tyranny. I would have noticed the*** **REFRIED BEANS ONLY IF THEY'D NOT BEEN THERE**

I have lived many years in San Francisco, where restaurant reviews are read religiously. The appetite for the new, the next, the best is a commendable cosmopolitanism, I suppose. But it was only because Marcel Proust's petite madeleine was unremarkable, because it tasted like every other madeleine, that it had the potency to recover the past.

It turned out that only my nephew Tom—my shy nephew who did not speak at the table—understood the taste of my father's refried beans. Years later, he opened a Mexican restaurant called Tacubaya, in Berkeley. One Saturday, I stopped in for a lunch of scrambled eggs and refried beans, and I tasted what I hadn't realized I yearned for. I tasted my father.

RICHARD RODRIGUEZ *is the author of* Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father *(Penguin, 1992).*

The Gift of Friendship

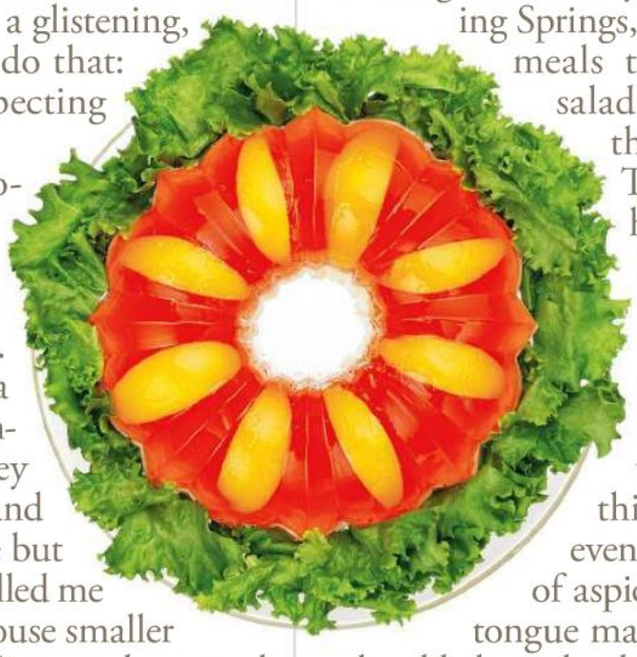
My mother had just passed away. I was in the Bay Area to close up her apartment, and her 85-year-old best friend, Betty Badgett, invited me over for lunch. I've always loved Betty's cooking: a country girl who moved to California from Oklahoma in the late 1940s, she's always seemed to reconnect with her roots by preparing the kind of good old-fashioned food she grew up with, incorporating fresh vegetables and herbs from the gardens that surround her house. When I arrived for lunch, there was roast beef, mashed potatoes, stewed lima beans with fresh sage, a salad of iceberg lettuce, warm biscuits, and lots of good butter. For dessert, a homemade blackberry pie. There was a pitcher of ice water filled with lemon slices; the lemons had come from the decades-old Meyer lemon tree in Betty's backyard. I probably ate three times as much food as I should have, but how could I not? That delicious lunch was the perfect way to honor my mom, who would have loved everything about it. *—James Oseland*

ILLUSTRATION: BEPPE GIACOBBE/MORGAN GAYNIN. FACING PAGE: TODD COLEMAN

Lost in Translation

During the summer of 1975 in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Kochanowicz family of Shelby, North Carolina, introduced the Truong family, formerly of Can Tho, South Vietnam, and more recently of the nearby town of Boiling Springs, to an important American food group: Jell-O salad.

We were horrified, which was really saying something considering that this man, woman, and child had only months before escaped from a country at war. Jell-O, jarred mayo, grated carrots, and a handful of raisins molded into a glistening, wobbly, neon-bright ring can do that: scare the pants off an unsuspecting Vietnamese refugee family.



My parents had met the Kochanowiczs at St. Mary Catholic Church, a minority institution within a vast landscape of Southern Baptists. Mrs. Kochanowicz wore her hair in a beehivey updo, and Mr. Kochanowicz favored plaid pants. They had two children, a daughter and a son, who were older than me but who never once teased me or called me names. The family lived in a house smaller than our riverfront villa in Vietnam but much larger than the trailer we now called home. I was seven years old in 1975, and those were the kinds of things that I found noteworthy. Still do, in fact.

We wore our nicest clothes to the Kochanowiczs' house, and we practiced saying their last name—ko-HAN-o-vick—out of respect for this family who had invited us so warmly and without artifice. There were probably casseroles on the table, the crunchy top promising what the gooey underbelly could never deliver. There might have been a pot roast, slow-cooked yet dried out. But like the victim of some early childhood trauma, I have wiped the slate, or rather, the Kochanowiczs' table, clean. Except for one dish.

It flickers in my imagination like a Super-8 film: the Jell-O salad, aglow with artificial food coloring, beckoning from the center of the table. A silver-plated pie server cuts a slab, which hovers and then jiggles onto my plate. I know my mother is keeping a watchful eye on me, making sure that I, like her, take a polite bite or two. I avoid the bottom layer, opaque with mayonnaise and whipped gelatin, and go for the iridescent dome, flecked and studded with vegetables and fruits.

During the three years that we lived in Boiling Springs, our families ate many more meals together. With the Jell-O salad's repeated appearance at the Kochanowiczs' table, the Truong family was no longer horrified, just perplexed. The form said dessert, while the function said salad. Surely, no one would combine mayonnaise and fruit. (We hadn't been introduced to the Waldorf salad yet. These things take time.) My mother even explained that it was a kind of aspic, which to her Francophile tongue made a lot of sense but for me only added another layer of mystery.

The last time I spoke to Mrs. Kochanowicz was when I telephoned to tell her that my father had passed away. Though our families had lost contact over the years as we Truongs, like good westward-bound pioneers, moved to Ohio and then to Texas, it seemed only right that I should let the Kochanowicz family know. They had welcomed us to their table, which in both of our cultures meant that they had welcomed us to be a part of their lives. My father was also the one Truong who ate their Jell-O salads with a resolve that showed that he, at least, understood long ago what they were really about. —*Monique Truong, author of* Bitter in the Mouth *(Random House, 2010)*

MICHAEL KRAUS

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KENJI MIURA, FROM *AJITO: JAPAN'S ULTIMATE DINING EXPERIENCE* (KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL, 2010)

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Kyoto Story

More than 40 summers ago, my husband and I were in Japan. My husband, a violinist, was touring with the New York Philharmonic, and I was accompanying him as "wife." We'd asked the guest conductor, Seiji Ozawa, where we might eat in Kyoto, and he suggested a restaurant called Kitcho.

We had to be driven into the suburbs—very undistinguished suburbs at that. The car stopped on a street with wooden houses jammed against one another. We climbed a flight of stairs and were led to a tatami-floored private dining room with a low table. As the sliding doors closed behind us, the world changed.

It started with the window, the sole point of focus. Like the work of an inspired photographer, it was framed to show only the bucolic—a part of a stream, a part of a tree. All ugliness had been banished.

The doors opened, kimonos rustled, and two waitresses glided in bearing frosty cups filled with pink plum wine. They withdrew. We sipped, contemplating our flowing stream in ecstatic silence.

The doors slid open again. A waitress carried…was it a vase? An epergne? It was a tray with a built-in stand, long stalks of green rice rising from its four corners. Were we to imagine a field? Perhaps, for on the tray was a ceramic bamboo stalk. Its top, once removed, revealed three sections, each containing a different type of caviar. Next to it was a pair of limes, standing on end, their tops lopped off and replaced like caps. We removed the caps. Inside was the most succulent abalone in a mustard sauce. We scraped down to the bottom with our chopsticks. We licked the chopsticks.

The next course brought two bowls filled with ice. Chilling there were layers of raw salmon slivers topped with equally thin lemon slices. We ate them as we sipped cold sake.

For the fourth dish, the waitresses, resting on their shins, uncovered two lacquer bowls. Fragrant wisps of steam rose into the air. It was the only time I have had turtle soup. It was clear, ethereal, with just a few bits of bobbing meat. We sighed one too many times.

The next act required participation. In front of us were fire-hot tiles and pieces of raw beef and vegetables. We placed some meat on the tiles. *Hssss!* Smoke rose in violent spurts. The room was perfumed with beef.

The finale came in two parts: first, green "snow"—crushed ice with green tea syrup and sweet red beans—followed by plates holding a whole orange and a bunch of grapes. As we touched the skin of the orange it came away in a spiral to reveal peeled, seeded, and reassembled segments. The grapes, too, had first been separated and seeded. Then a knife had been slipped in between the skin and flesh, so that when we lifted a grape to our mouths we could slurp its sweet goodness, leaving the skin behind.

Even as we walked to our car, we wondered if the meal had been an illusion. But we were clapping with silent hands. —*Madhur Jaffrey, author of* At Home with Madhur Jaffrey *(Knopf, 2010) and star of the films* Hiding Divya *(2010) and* Today's Special *(2009)*

A sea bream and turnip hot pot at the restaurant Kitcho, in Kyoto. For a recipe, see page 101.

Open House

The hard-won pleasures of Sunday lunch

By Gabrielle Hamilton

IT'S POSSIBLY NO EXAGGERATION to say that my mother-in-law Alda's Sunday lunch is a full third of the three things I like about being married to my Italian husband. The first time I attended one, at her large and elegant apartment in Rome, there were hand-cut egg noodles—*pasta fresca*—and roasted red peppers and boiled zucchini and cruets of golden oil from her own olive trees in Puglia. There was mozzarella, still warm from the *caseificio*, and the table was laid with her wedding silver and two heavy cloths, crisp and starched and freshly ironed. The tall shutters were half-closed against the harsh afternoon heat. The whole family—her six children and the spouses and the grandchildren—had arrived in a swarm, and soon the small mob was casually dispersed throughout the many rooms of the grand apartment, relaxed and just hanging out.

There were many bottles of chilled Müller-Thurgau from the Alto Adige—particularly delicious and nearly effervescent from acidity—that my husband had grabbed from the local wine store with the same total ease and casual confidence with which the Italians pick out their bright blue ties and pull on their orange cashmere sweaters. Effortless. Genetic. A freaking cultural birthright.

I've been to a dozen of Alda's Sunday lunches by now. If you doze in the big leather chair for a few minutes after the meal, she picks up the magazine that has slipped from your lap and sets it next to you on the table. If you break a dish while helping to clean up afterward, she shrugs and smiles, saying she never liked that dish anyway and she's been hoping for years someone would break it. If you stroll into the kitchen where she is arranging the food and snitch a sliver of prosciutto from a platter, she smiles and does not scold you.

GABRIELLE HAMILTON *is the chef-owner of the restaurant Prune in New York City. Her first book,* Blood, Bones, and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef, *will be published by Random House in March 2011.*

TODD COLEMAN

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I've come to want this for my kids, too. I want them to know that even when they are 40 years old, they can come over on Sunday at 2:00 P.M. and have lunch. They can bring their kids, their boss, their friends, their friends' friends. I don't care. Just come over.

So, finally, I decided to start the small tradition of Sunday lunch at our own home in New York; I told everyone I knew and invited them all. I'm starting a *tradition*, I said. It'll be every Sunday, I announced, from now through all eternity, and you are welcome.

For the inaugural lunch, I composed a menu with Alda in mind and shaped it around what I thought she might cook. I would make a fresh pasta dish with fried eggs and pine nuts and brown butter. And there would be some fennel with cream and Parmesan, baked *al forno*, by which I mean in our General Electric digitally controlled oven, into which we have shoved a heavy pizza stone that lives there permanently. I also planned a simple *bagna cauda* of sweet red cabbage wedges, elevated by warm anchovy butter. And for Michele, my husband, I'd make some *scamorza* cheese fried in a pan—a dish that he loves and that he taught me to make. Some of his doctor and scientist friends were expected, and a writer friend of mine.

Except that somehow my husband and I fell into one of those massive, lacerating, deep and dark marital blowouts that you never forget for as long as you live. On Sunday morning I came downstairs and started to boil water for my coffee. I was looking in the cupboard for a filter but landed on a brand-new box of instant mashed potatoes.

"Whoa," I exclaimed.

Michele, trying to enjoy the

Brown butter pasta topped with pine nuts and fried eggs (see page 98 for a recipe).

newspaper, looked up over his reading glasses and said, "What?" Then he reached across the counter and pointed out to me the big red advertising hype splashed across the front of the box, and read it out loud in his thick Italian accent: "One hundred perrrrrcent rrrreal Idaho poe-tay-toes."

Michele has both an M.D. and a Ph.D. and he doesn't mind my telling you so. I am a chef who started as a dishwasher 30 years ago, and that little discrepancy between us, I should mention, comes up from time to time. And somehow it presents itself on this morning and escalates, unfortunately, to previously unreached and ferocious heights. The double-doctor educates me—the poor little dishwasher who will sadly never understand the complex and scientific virtues of dehydrated potatoes—as he will.

I break furniture.

"I can't even *fake* this lunch," I bellowed. "I'm not going through the goddamned *motions*," I yelled down the banister as I grabbed our two young sons—the remaining full two-thirds of what I like about being married to this man—and stomped up to the third floor of our home.

Oddly, I don't really give such a big shit about boxed mash in our cupboard. We've got Hellmann's. We've got Häagen-Dazs. We've got Progresso. There are chemicals produced by Dow stashed under our kitchen sink. It's not that.

But whatever it is, I spend the rest of the morning on the third floor with the kids, refusing to cook. In my industry, you are never down or off. Your bad day, your imminent divorce, your no-show, no-call dishwasher don't count. You suck it up and give good restaurant. But for some reason, on this particular day, worn down in just this particular way over a box of dehydrated freeze-dried potato flakes, I could not rally.

Then I heard the doorbell. I heard voices way downstairs. I did not uncross my arms from in front of my chest. The doorbell rang again, and sounds of life and gaiety began to float up to the third floor and then, right behind that, the smell of something good to eat. Something rather good. Catharted and spent—I had screamed what there was to be screamed, cried what needed to be cried—I took the stairs one step at a time, with my two boys in my arms, and joined everyone in the kitchen.

Michele, now in an apron, had completely rallied. He had opened the very best Italian reds that we owned and into the oven he had plopped two frozen cheese pizzas onto the stone. He smiled at me in exactly the right way, the way that says "Let's forget it," and poured me a glass of the Sassicaia, a ruby incredibleness, which made a direct warm path to my heart. And then this man—*amore mio*—pulled the pizza out of the *forno*; the otherwise doughy, bad bread basket type of crust had become extra crisp and the flabby cheese had become nutty and concentrated. We all descended on it. Just by cranking the oven to 500 degrees and leaving them in for a little longer than the package instructions advise, he had made a truly delicious lunch, which is one way of salvaging store-bought frozen pizza—and tradition—that I will forever remember. By the back door, I noticed, he had stacked the broken chair into a neat bundle of kindling, to be put out later with the garbage.

MICHELE SMILED AT ME *in the way that says "Let's forget it." He poured me a glass of the Sassicaia, a ruby incredibleness, which made a* **DIRECT WARM PATH TO MY HEART**

TODD COLEMAN

Playing Favorites

Having consumed something like 75,000 meals in my lifetime, it is a daunting task to pick a favorite. There was that first meal in Paris, in a rustic, low-ceilinged restaurant on the ground floor of the Hotel Scandinavie, where homemade charcuterie was the mainstay of a menu that surprised and delighted me, an 18-year-old fashion model on her first trip abroad. There was my first fancy dinner in New York, with my husband-to-be and his brother and sister-in-law, at Henri Soule's Le Pavillon in the Ritz Tower, where I feasted on *quenelles de brochet*, finely roasted duck (deftly carved table-side), and a giant *île flottante* for dessert. Oh, or my last dinner at the old, elegant Lutèce, with a potential secret lover, where the food and wine more than equaled his seduction and actually canceled it out. Or that astonishing pièce de résistance prepared by Alain Ducasse himself at his fanciest restaurant, the Louis XV in the Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo: perfectly braised *poulet de Bresse* and tender white turnips, which melted in my mouth. And I'll never forget the lunch prepared by a group of Buddhist monks in old Shanghai in the early 1980s, where tofu was fashioned, according to secret recipes, into exacting vegetarian equivalents of lobster, pork, chicken, and beef. Was my greatest meal really something a great chef made for me? Yes, maybe—but it could just as easily have been something I made for others. The slab of *pain de seigle* rye bread mounded with buttery, scrambled homegrown eggs and giant globs of golden osetra caviar (pre-ban, of course) for Christmas breakfast, perhaps, or the fiery lobster *fra diavolo* I like to serve in Maine atop spaghetti. Or my homemade fettuccine egg noodles tossed with butter, aged Parmesan, and a king's ransom of shaved white truffles, with a simple salad of buttercrunch lettuce from the garden. Oh, don't make me choose! —*Martha Stewart, founder of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia*

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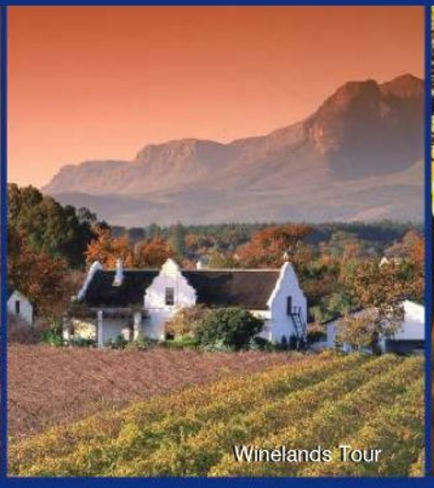
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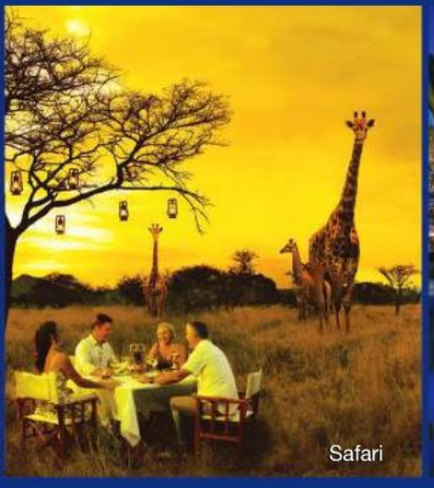
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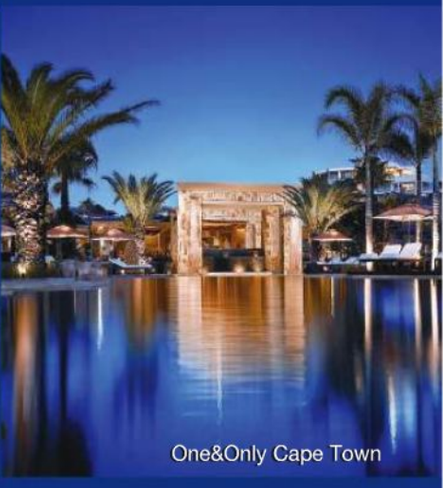
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MAIN DISHES

BOUILLON DE CHAMPIGNONS COMME UN CAPPUCCINO

(Mushroom Cappuccino)

SERVES 4

Michelin three-star chef Alain Chapel wowed author Gael Greene with this innovative "cappuccino" (pictured on page 52), a rich, earthy soup made with mushrooms. To foam the broth, use the steamer attachment on a cappuccino machine, or froth it in a blender.

- **6 tbsp. butter**
- **1 lb. button mushrooms, halved**
- **8 oz. mixed mushrooms, such as oyster, shiitake, and blue foot, thinly sliced, trimmings reserved**
- **1 oz. dried shiitake mushrooms**
- **1 ½ cups heavy cream**
- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **Cayenne pepper, to taste**
- **12 crayfish tails, cooked and shelled, or 4 oz. cooked lobster meat, cut into bite-size pieces**
- **4 sprigs fresh chervil or tarragon leaves**

1. Heat 3 tbsp. butter in a 3-qt. high-sided skillet over medium heat. Add button mushrooms and mushroom trimmings and cook, stirring often, until they release their liquid, about 10 minutes. Add ¾ oz. dried shiitakes and 4 cups of water; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until liquid has reduced to 3 cups, about 10 minutes. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a 2-qt. saucepan. Strain broth, pressing mushrooms with the back of a spoon to extract liquid; discard solids. Add cream to mushroom broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until flavors meld, about 10 minutes. Season broth with salt and a pinch of cayenne and set aside.

2. In a spice grinder, grind remaining dried shiitake mushrooms to a fine powder. Transfer mushroom powder to a small skillet over medium-high heat and toast, swirling pan constantly, until fragrant, about 5 minutes. Transfer mushroom powder to a small bowl; set aside.

3. Heat remaining butter in the skillet over medium heat. Add mixed mushrooms, season with salt, and cook, stirring gently, until tender, 4–5 minutes. Add crayfish, season with salt, and cook until hot. Remove pan from heat and set aside.

4. To serve, foam reserved broth on high speed in a blender or with the steamer attachment on an espresso machine. Mound crayfish mixture in 4 teacups or small bowls, and ladle in broth. Spoon foam on top, dust with mushroom powder, and garnish with chervil.

BROWN BUTTER PASTA

SERVES 4

Chef Gabrielle Hamilton of New York City's Prune restaurant gave us her recipe for this delicious pasta (pictured on page 94), which is tossed in brown butter and pine nuts, then topped with sunny-side-up eggs.

- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **8 oz. fresh pasta, such as fettuccine or tagliatelle**
- **1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter**
- **¾ cup pine nuts**
- **4 eggs**
- **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **Freshly grated Parmesan and grated nutmeg, to taste**

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and add pasta; cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente, about 4 minutes. Set a strainer over a bowl; drain pasta, reserving ½ cup pasta cooking water, and set aside.

2. Melt butter in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Add pine nuts and cook, stirring often, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer pine nuts to a bowl. Working in two batches, crack eggs into butter and cook, spooning butter over yolks, until whites are set but yolks are still runny, about 3 minutes. Transfer eggs to a plate and keep warm. Add pasta and half the pine nuts to skillet and toss until hot. Stir in some of the reserved pasta water to create a sauce, and season with salt and pepper. To serve, divide pasta between 4 serving plates and top each serving with a fried egg. Sprinkle with remaining pine nuts, Parmesan, and nutmeg.

CLASSIC MEATBALLS

SERVES 4–6

The key to making these meatballs (pictured on page 64) is to brown them first in a skillet and then braise them in a sauce of red wine and tomatoes. Serve them with crusty bread or spaghetti to sop up the sauce.

- **10 oz. ground beef chuck or veal**
- **10 oz. ground pork shoulder**
- **2 oz. minced pork fat or unsmoked bacon**
- **2 oz. prosciutto, minced**
- **1 ¼ cups loosely packed flat-leaf parsley leaves, minced, plus more for garnish**
- **2 tsp. dried oregano**
- **1 ½ tsp. fennel seeds**
- **1 tsp. crushed red chile flakes**
- **½ tsp. ground cumin**
- **¼ tsp. ground allspice**
- **7 slices white bread, finely ground in a food processor**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **⅔ cup ricotta, drained in a strainer for 2 hours**
- **2 tbsp. milk**
- **3 eggs, lightly beaten**
- **6 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for greasing**
- **¼ cup dry red wine**
- **4 cups canned tomato purée**
- **1 cup beef or veal stock or water**
- **Grated Parmesan, for garnish**

1. In a large bowl, combine beef, pork, pork fat, prosciutto, parsley, oregano, fennel seeds, chile flakes, cumin, allspice, and bread crumbs and season generously with salt and pepper. Using your fingers, mix ingredients until combined; set aside. In a medium bowl, whisk together ricotta, milk, and eggs; add to meat mixture and gently mix until incorporated. Chill for 1 hour.

2. Heat oven to 300°. Grease 2 rimmed baking sheets with oil and set aside. Using a 2-oz. ice cream scoop, portion mixture, roll into meatballs with your hands, and transfer to greased baking sheets. Heat 3 tbsp. oil in a 3-qt. high-sided skillet over medium-high heat. Add half the meatballs; cook, turning occasionally, until browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer meatballs to a plate; wipe out skillet. Repeat with remaining oil and meatballs. Return reserved meatballs to skillet along with any juices from the plate. Add wine; increase heat to high and cook for 2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and beef stock, bring to a boil, and tightly cover skillet. Transfer to oven; bake until meatballs are tender and have absorbed some of the sauce, about 1 ½ hours. To serve, transfer meatballs to a platter; spoon over sauce. Sprinkle with Parmesan and parsley. Serve with bread or spaghetti, if you like.

ELEGANT PORK CHOPS

SERVES 4

Authors Jane and Michael Stern gave us this recipe from Virginia Miller, a home cook from Iowa who bakes thick-cut pork chops in a sweet, tomatoey sauce (pictured on page 76).

- **4 double-cut, bone-in pork chops**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **2 cups brown sugar**
- **2 cups soy sauce**
- **1 tbsp. molasses**
- **1 ¾ cups ketchup**
- **1 ½ cups chili sauce, such as Heinz**
- **2 tbsp. French dressing**
- **1 tbsp. dry mustard**

1. Put pork chops into a baking dish and season with salt and pepper. In a small bowl, whisk ½ cup brown sugar, soy sauce, molasses, and 1 cup water and pour over meat. Cover with plastic wrap and let pork chops marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours.

2. Heat oven to 375°. Drain pork chops

TODD COLEMAN (4)

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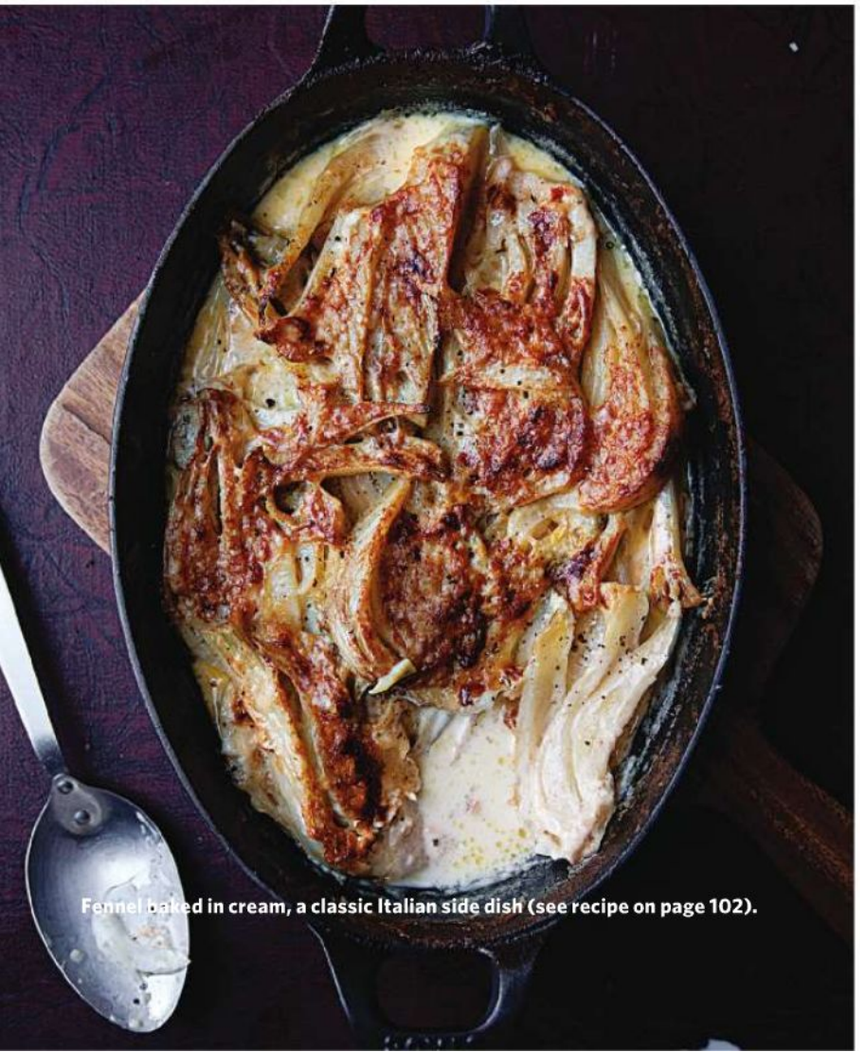
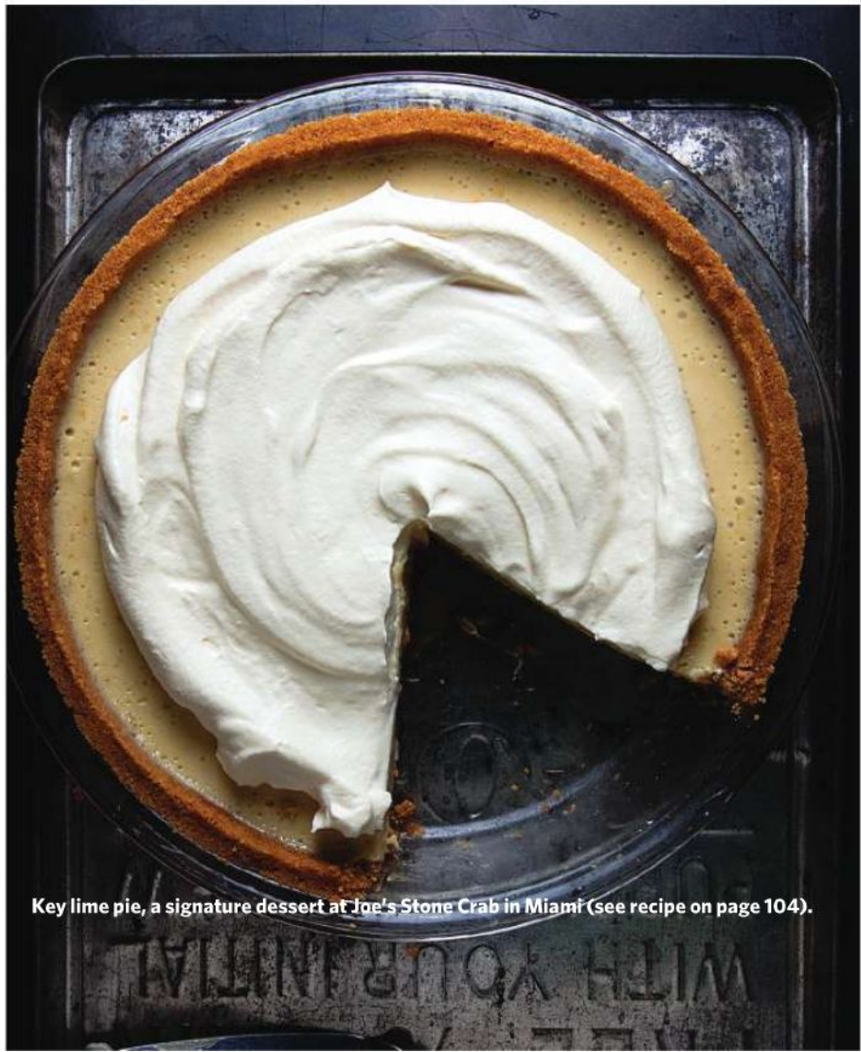
Vegetarian chili (see recipe on page 102).

Flat bread with spiced lamb and tomatoes (see recipe on page 100).



Fennel baked in cream, a classic Italian side dish (see recipe on page 102).



Key lime pie, a signature dessert at Joe's Stone Crab in Miami (see recipe on page 104).

and transfer to a 9" x 13" baking dish. Whisk together remaining brown sugar, ketchup, chili sauce, French dressing, mustard, and ⅓ cup water in a small bowl. Pour sauce over pork chops and bake, turning pork chops and basting with sauce occasionally, until pork chops are tender and sauce has thickened, about 45 minutes. Let pork chops rest for 10 minutes before serving.

JOE'S STONE CRAB POT PIE

SERVES 2

A store-bought crab soup base (see page 115 for a source) intensifies the flavor of the creamy filling in these puff pastry–topped pies (pictured on facing page).

- **3 tbsp. unsalted butter**
- **2 tbsp. flour**
- **1¼ cups heavy cream**
- **¼ cup milk**
- **2 tbsp. crab soup base (see page 115)**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **1 small carrot, peeled and cut into ⅛" cubes**
- **1 small new potato, peeled and cut into ⅛" cubes**
- **⅓ cup frozen peas**
- **12 pearl onions, peeled**
- **1 large button mushroom, stemmed and minced**
- **1 small rib celery, minced**
- **¼ red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and minced**
- **10 oz. stone, jonah, or jumbo lump crab meat**
- **1 9" x 11" sheet store-bought frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- **Paprika, to garnish**

❶ Melt 1 tbsp. butter in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add flour and cook, stirring, until lightly toasted, 1–2 minutes. Add cream, milk, and crab soup base and bring to a simmer; cook, whisking often, until smooth and thick, 3–4 minutes. Season cream sauce with salt and pepper and set aside.

❷ Heat 1 tbsp. butter in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Add carrots and potatoes and cook, stirring often, until just soft, 4–5 minutes. Add peas, onions, mushrooms, celery, and bell peppers and cook until hot, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl, gently stir in reserved cream sauce and the crab meat, and season with salt and pepper. Divide crab mixture, mounding if necessary to fit, between two 4½"-diameter, 10-oz. ovenproof ramekins or mini pie pans; set aside.

❸ Heat oven to 350°. Using a rolling pin, gently roll out puff pastry to ¼" thickness; using a 6" round cutter, cut out 2 pastry rounds and place 1 on top of each ramekin, sealing edges around rims of ramekins. Transfer pies to an aluminum foil–lined baking sheet, and poke a small hole in the top of each pastry with a knife. Melt and brush remaining butter over pastry and sprinkle with paprika. Bake until golden brown, 35–40 minutes. Let cool 10 minutes before serving.

LAHMACUN

(Flat Bread with Lamb and Tomatoes)

SERVES 4–6

Bake these Turkish spiced lamb and tomato flat breads (pictured on page 99) on a heated pizza stone in the oven so that the crust and topping cook evenly.

- **1 tsp. sugar**
- **1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast**
- **2 cups flour, plus more**
- **1½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more**
- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **3 tbsp. tomato paste**
- **1 tbsp. minced flat-leaf parsley**
- **½ tsp. cayenne pepper**
- **¼ tsp. ground cumin**
- **¼ tsp. sweet paprika**
- **⅛ tsp. ground cinnamon**
- **3 oz. ground lamb**
- **2 cloves garlic, minced**
- **1 plum tomato, grated**
- **1 small onion, grated**
- **½ serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced**

❶ Combine sugar, yeast, and ¾ cup water heated to 115° in a small bowl; let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Combine flour and salt in a bowl and make a well in the center. Add yeast mixture and stir to form a dough. Transfer dough to a lightly floured surface; knead until smooth, about 6 minutes. Transfer dough to a lightly oiled bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let dough rest until doubled in size, about 1 hour. Punch down dough, divide into 4 portions, and roll each portion into a ball. Transfer dough balls to a floured baking sheet. Cover with a damp tea towel and let rest for 45 minutes.

❷ Meanwhile, make the topping: In a large bowl, combine oil, tomato paste, parsley, cayenne, cumin, paprika, and cinnamon and stir vigorously with a fork. Stir in lamb, garlic, tomatoes, onions, and chiles and season with salt; set topping aside.

❸ Put a pizza stone in bottom third of oven and heat oven to 475°. Working with one dough ball at a time, use a rolling pin to roll dough into a 10" disk. Brush off excess flour and transfer dough to a piece of parchment paper. Spoon 3–4 tbsp. topping onto dough and using your fingers, spread topping evenly to edges. Season with salt. Holding parchment paper by its edges, transfer to baking stone. Bake until dough is golden brown and topping is cooked, 6–8 minutes. Repeat with remaining dough and topping; serve warm or at room temperature.

SANEEYEH BIL FERN

(Roasted Lamb Shoulder and Vegetables)

SERVES 4

Based on a recipe from Armenian-American author Peter Balakian, this dish (pictured on page 55) calls for slow-roasting lamb over okra, green beans, and eggplant until the lamb is tender and the vegetables have absorbed some of its juices.

- **4 10-oz. lamb shoulder chops**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **8 oz. green beans, trimmed**
- **8 oz. okra**
- **6 cloves garlic, smashed**
- **2 medium tomatoes, sliced ½" thick**
- **2 medium zucchini, cut into ½" pieces**
- **2 onions, roughly chopped**
- **2 small eggplants, cut into ½" pieces**
- **½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley**

Heat oven to 325°. Season lamb with salt and pepper; set aside. Put green beans, okra, garlic, tomatoes, zucchini, onions, and eggplants into a large roasting pan. Add oil, season with salt and pepper, and toss to combine. Arrange lamb over top. Cover dish with foil and cook for 1 hour. Uncover and continue cooking until lamb is browned and tender, about 1 hour more. Remove dish from oven, sprinkle with parsley, and let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

SPELT RISOTTO WITH BEETS AND HORSERADISH

SERVES 4

Heston Blumenthal, chef at the Fat Duck in Bray, England, gave us the recipe for this dish (pictured on page 68), which was inspired by his trip to Transylvania. Blumenthal substitutes spelt, a wheat berry found in most supermarkets, for the more common short-grain rice to give the risotto a nutty flavor and a toothsome bite.

- **¼ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste**
- **1 cup spelt, soaked overnight, drained, and rinsed (see page 115)**
- **¼ cup white wine vinegar**
- **1 tbsp. sugar**
- **1 small beet, peeled and cut into ⅛" cubes**
- **⅓ cup crème fraîche**
- **2 tbsp. prepared horseradish**
- **1 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- **¼ small bulb fennel, cored and thinly shaved on a mandoline**
- **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **1 cup beet juice**
- **1½ cups chicken stock**
- **2 tbsp. canola oil**

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- **2 cloves garlic, minced**
- **1 large shallot, minced**
- **½ cup madeira**
- **½ cup freshly grated Parmesan**
- **4 tbsp. unsalted butter**

❶ Bring 6 cups salted water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan, add spelt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente (the spelt will retain a slight crunch), 15–20 minutes. Drain and set aside.

❷ Whisk together ¼ tsp. salt, vinegar, and sugar in a small bowl until sugar is dissolved; add beet cubes and let marinate for 1 hour. Drain and chill beets. In a small bowl, mix together crème fraîche and horseradish; set aside in refrigerator. In another small bowl, toss together olive oil and fennel and season with salt and pepper; set aside in refrigerator.

❸ Pour beet juice into a 1-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat and cook until reduced by half; set beet juice aside and let cool. Meanwhile, heat chicken stock in a small saucepan over medium heat; set aside and keep warm. Heat canola oil in a 10" skillet over medium heat and add garlic and shallots; cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, 2–3 minutes. Add spelt and cook, stirring often, until lightly toasted, 2–3 minutes. Add madeira and cook until it is reduced to a thick syrup, about 5 minutes. Add half of reserved chicken stock and cook, stirring often, until absorbed, about 8 minutes. Add the remaining stock, ¼ cup at a time, and cook until it is absorbed before adding the next amount. Add the reduced beet juice and cook, stirring often, until liquid is creamy and spelt is tender, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in Parmesan and butter, and season with salt and pepper; let risotto sit for 3 minutes.

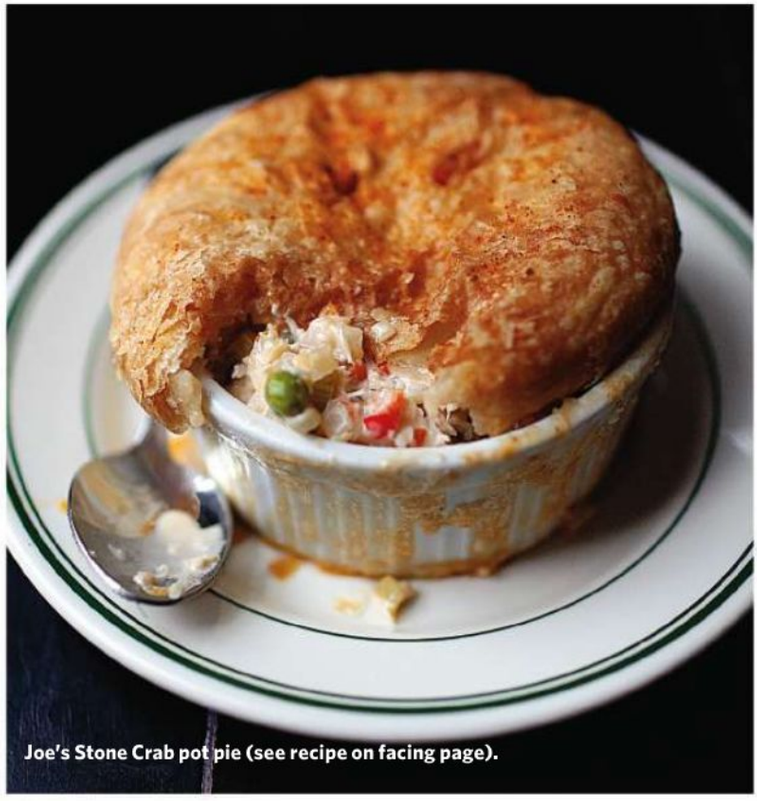
❹ To serve, divide the risotto between 4 shallow serving bowls and top with a dollop of the reserved horseradish cream. Garnish the risotto with the reserved fennel and beet cubes. Serve warm.

TAI KABURA

(Sea Bream and Turnip Hot Pot)

SERVES 2

The recipe for this elegant fish soup (pictured on page 92) was inspired by the version served at Kitcho, the legendary Kyoto restaurant. The soup's deeply flavored broth, called dashi, gets its boost of umami flavor from kombu seaweed (a type of kelp) and dried bonito flakes, two staples of the Japanese pantry. For a source for hard-to-find ingredients, see page 115.



Joe's Stone Crab pot pie (see recipe on facing page).

- **2 oz. kombu, cleaned with a wet paper towel**
- **½ oz. dried bonito flakes**
- **1 whole sea bream, red snapper, or black sea bass (about 1½ lbs.), cleaned**
- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **½ cup plus 2 tbsp. sake**
- **1 tbsp. mirin**
- **14 oz. turnips, peeled and cut into 1" pieces**
- **1 tbsp. light soy sauce**
- **2 cups cooked rice (optional)**

❶ Combine kombu and 8 cups water in a 4-qt. pot and let sit for 30 minutes. Bring to a boil; using tongs, remove and discard kombu. Add bonito flakes and reduce heat to medium-low; simmer for 5 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let steep for 15 minutes. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a small oval pot or 3-qt. high-sided skillet. Strain stock, discarding bonito flakes; set aside.

❷ Using a knife, score fish ¼" deep, making one lengthwise cut down the middle of the fish from head to tail and two crosswise cuts spaced 2" apart. Repeat on other side and transfer to a bowl. Season cavity and skin with salt and pour ½ cup sake over fish. Refrigerate, turning fish occasionally, for 20 minutes.

❸ Heat the reserved stock over medium-high heat. Stir in the remaining sake and the mirin. Add turnips and cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer turnips to a bowl. Drain fish, add to the pot, and simmer, skimming off any foam from surface and continually spooning broth over fish, until fish is cooked through, about 8 minutes. Nestle the reserved turnips in pot and season soup with soy sauce; let cook 2 more minutes. Serve soup directly from the pot with a side of rice, if you like.

TOM YUM GOONG

(Hot and Sour Shrimp Soup)

SERVES 2

Fragrant with lime juice and lemongrass, this hot and sour soup (pictured on page 59) is based on a recipe from our friend Nancie McDermott, author of *Real Thai* (Chronicle Books, 1992). For a source for hard-to-find ingredients, see page 115.

- **3 large stalks fresh lemongrass**
- **4 cups chicken stock**
- **12 fresh or frozen Kaffir lime leaves**
- **1 cup canned straw mushrooms, drained**
- **2–4 tbsp. roasted Thai chile paste (nam prik pao)**
- **8 oz. medium shrimp, peeled and deveined**
- **1½ tbsp. fish sauce**
- **4–6 Thai chiles, stemmed and smashed with side of a knife**
- **3 scallions, cut into 1" lengths**
- **Juice of 1 lime**
- **2 cups cooked rice (optional)**

❶ Trim tip and root ends of lemongrass stalks and remove and discard tough outer layer. Using a meat mallet or the side of a knife, smash lemongrass to flatten it; tie stalks into a knot; set aside. Pour stock into a 2-qt. saucepan and bring to a boil. Add lemongrass and half the lime leaves, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until fragrant, about 5 minutes.

❷ Remove and discard lemongrass and lime leaves and increase heat to high. Stir in mushrooms and chile paste, to taste, and boil for 1 minute; add shrimp and fish sauce and cook until shrimp are just cooked through, about 45 seconds. Combine remaining lime leaves with chiles, scallions, and lime juice in a serving bowl or tureen. Pour soup into serving bowl, stir, and serve with rice, if you like.

TODD COLEMAN

TROUT MEUNIÈRE AMANDINE

(Trout with Brown Butter and Almonds)

SERVES 4

Fried fish with a brown butter sauce and almonds (pictured on page 79) is a French classic, and one of the most popular dishes at the beloved New Orleans restaurant Galatoire's.

- **1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter**
- **1 tbsp. red wine vinegar**
- **2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**
- **Canola oil, for frying**
- **2 cups milk**
- **2 eggs**
- **2 cups flour**
- **4 8-oz. boneless, skinless sea trout, redfish, or red snapper filets**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **3 cups sliced almonds, toasted**
- **1 tbsp. minced parsley, for garnish**
- **1 lemon, cut into slices, for serving**

❶ Heat butter in an 8" skillet over medium heat; cook, stirring, until solids turn dark brown, 20–25 minutes. Remove from heat; whisk in vinegar and lemon juice; set sauce aside.

❷ Pour oil into a 6-qt. Dutch oven to a depth of 2"; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. In a shallow dish, whisk together milk and eggs; put flour into another shallow dish. Season fish with salt and pepper. Working with one filet at a time, dip fish in flour, shake off excess, and then dip in egg mixture and shake off excess. Return filets to flour; transfer to a rack over a baking sheet. Working in two batches, fry fish until golden brown, 5–6 minutes, then drain on paper towels. To serve, divide fish between 4 plates; sprinkle almonds on top. Whisk sauce and spoon over fish. Garnish with parsley; serve with lemon slices.

VEGETARIAN CHILI

SERVES 6–8

Author Suketu Mehta gave us the recipe for this chili (pictured on page 99). We recommend making a lengthwise slit down the side of each of the fresh chiles to release some of their intense floral heat (see page 113 for more about this technique).

- **12 oz. dried dark kidney beans, soaked overnight**
- **12 oz. dried pinto beans, soaked overnight**
- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **12 cloves garlic, minced**
- **3 dried chipotle chiles**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **2 large white onions, chopped**
- **1 dried ancho chile**
- **8 oz. button mushrooms, quartered**
- **6 medium tomatoes, chopped**
- **1½ cups canned hominy, drained**
- **½ cup tomato paste**
- **2 tbsp. red wine vinegar**
- **2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves**
- **1 tsp. dried oregano**
- **1 tsp. ground cumin**
- **8 sun-dried tomatoes, chopped**
- **3–6 naga jolokia or habanero chiles, slit lengthwise down one side**
- **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **Sour cream, minced cilantro, and minced red onion**

❶ Put kidney beans and pinto beans into a large pot and cover with 3" water; bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until beans are tender, about 1 hour. Season with salt; set pot aside.

❷ Heat oil in a 6-qt. pot over medium-high heat. Add garlic, chipotle chiles, bay leaves, onions, and ancho chile and cook, stirring often, until onions are golden, 12–15 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring often, until tender, about 8 minutes. Add tomatoes and cook, stirring, until they release their juices, about 5 minutes. Stir in reserved beans and their cooking liquid, along with hominy, tomato paste, vinegar, thyme, oregano, cumin, sun-dried tomatoes, and habaneros and season with salt and pepper. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until chili thickens and flavors meld, about 1 hour. Serve chili topped with sour cream, cilantro, and red onions.

SIDE DISHES

APRICOT AND WALNUT STUFFING

SERVES 8–10

Author Marc Maron gave us this recipe for his showpiece Thanksgiving stuffing (pictured on page 82), studded with dried fruit and enriched with chicken livers.

- **1 1-lb. loaf white bread, crusts removed, cut into 1" cubes**
- **1 cup white wine**
- **2 cups dried apricots, apples, and currants, chopped**
- **16 tbsp. butter, softened**
- **3 ribs celery, chopped**
- **2 large onions, chopped**
- **4 oz. chicken livers, minced**
- **2 cups walnuts, roughly chopped**
- **¾ cup heavy cream**
- **½ cup minced flat-leaf parsley**
- **2 tsp. orange zest**
- **2 eggs, beaten**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

❶ Heat oven to 350°. Bake bread cubes on a baking sheet until browned, 20–25 minutes. Transfer bread cubes to a large bowl; set aside. Boil wine in a 1-qt. saucepan and add dried fruit; remove from heat and let steep for 30 minutes. Strain fruit; discard wine. Combine fruit with bread.

❷ Heat 4 tbsp. butter in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add celery and onions; cook, stirring, until browned, 12–15 minutes. Stir in 8 tbsp. butter and livers; cook until butter melts. Mix celery mixture with bread; stir in walnuts, cream, parsley, zest, and eggs. Season with salt and pepper.

❸ Transfer stuffing to a 2-qt. oval baking dish; dot with remaining butter. Cover with foil; bake for 50 minutes. Uncover, increase heat to 475°, and bake until browned, 8–10 minutes.

CHAO SIGUA

(Stir-Fried Loofah)

SERVES 2

This garlicky stir-fry (pictured on page 85) is made with loofah, a long, slender gourd that has soft, tender flesh beneath its ridged green peel. See page 111 for more information and page 115 for a source.

- **2 tbsp. canola oil**
- **4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced lengthwise**
- **1 lb. loofah gourd, peeled and cut diagonally into 1½"-long pieces (see page 115)**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste**
- **Sugar, to taste**

Heat oil in a 14" flat-bottomed wok or nonstick skillet over high heat. Add garlic; cook, stirring, until golden, 15–20 seconds. Add loofah and 1 tbsp. water; season with salt, white pepper, and sugar. Cook, stirring, until just tender, 30–60 seconds. Serve immediately.

FINOCCHIO AL FORNO

(Fennel Baked in Cream)

SERVES 6–8

Chef Gabrielle Hamilton of Prune restaurant in New York City turned us on to this simple, classic Italian preparation (pictured on page 99), which calls for baking fennel in the oven with cream and Parmesan to create a luxurious gratin.

- **1½ lbs. fennel (about 2 large bulbs), stalks removed, halved lengthwise, and cut into ½" wedges**
- **2 cups heavy cream**
- **1½ cups finely grated Parmesan**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed**

Heat oven to 425°. In a bowl, toss together fennel, cream, and 1 cup Parmesan; season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a 3-qt. baking dish;

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tales of the COCKTAIL NEW ORLEANS 2010

COINTREAU *at* TALES *of the* COCKTAIL

Cointreau Congratulates the
COCKTAIL APPRENTICE CLASS of 2010

Cointreau Orange Liqueur, the legendary French spirit established in 1849, is the proud sponsor of the Cocktail Apprentice Program (CAP) at **Tales of the Cocktail 2010**. Led by Don Lee, Jeff Grdinich, and John Deragon, the CAP program was developed to give talented bartenders from around the world the opportunity to work with some of the world's most influential mixologists, further develop their bartending skills, and get hands-on experience with spirits professionals.

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2010!

CAPs alphabetical by first name: Bradley Bolt, Bradley Farran, Bryan Matthys, California Gold, Carie Fuller, Cassie Fellet, Chad Doll, Christine Nielson, Christopher Churilla, Corey Bunnewith, Cristiana DeLucca, Cristina Dehlavi, Daniel de Oliveira, Eamon Rockey, Erica Pearce, Eryn Reece, Frank Cisneros, Franky Marshall, Hal Wolin, Jamie Kilgore, Jared Schubert, Jonathan Armstrong, Kimberly Patton-Bragg, Luis Bustamante, Matthew Eggleston, Meaghan Dorman, Michelle Peake, Naomi Schimek, Navarro Carr, Neil Kopplin, Nicholas Jarrett, Patrick O'Brien, Rachel Kim, Robert Leavey, Serena O'Callaghan, Sharon Floyd, Sierra Zimei, Summer Voelker, Sudeep Rangi, Sylvia Cosmopoulos, Thomas Klus, Tiffany Soles, and William Dollard; **Featured guests:** Founders of the Tales of the Cocktail, Ann and Paul Tunnerman, Cointreau Ambassadress and International Queen of Burlesque, Dita Von Teese, and Cointreau Brand Mixologist, Erin Williams.

SAVEUR *presents the* COINTREAU BAR STAR MIX-OFF

Four lucky finalists participated in an exciting live mix off event that was the talk of Tales.

After 20 minutes of shaking and tasting, SAVEUR crowned the 2010 Cointreau Bar Star, Danielle Marchant! Our esteemed judging panel—Paul Pacult, Dale DeGroff, Erin Williams, and Chef John Besh—agreed that the flavor and balance of Danielle's drink was what earned her the top spot.

Danielle and her on-site cocktail advisor, Lynnette Marrero, will enjoy a trip to the Cointreau Distillery and Academy in November. Danielle also won a coveted place to join the Cointreau Apprentice Class of 2011 at next year's Tales of the Cocktail. **Congratulations Danielle!**

THE WINNING COCKTAIL:
OUT OF COINTREAU'L

Created by Danielle Marchant
Bruno's, San Francisco

- 1 Blackberry
- 3 Raspberries
- Sprig Rosemary
- 1 oz. Cointreau
- 1 oz. Mount Gay Eclipse Silver Rum
- ½-¾ oz Fresh Lime Juice
- 1½ oz. Coconut Water

① Muddle the berries and the rosemary with lime juice. ② Add other ingredients, shake vigorously, and double strain into martini glass. ③ Garnish with a small lime wheel and rosemary sprig on the edge of the glass. ④ Squeeze orange peel over cocktail and lightly around rim to release oil, then discard.

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dot with butter. Cover dish with foil; bake for 60 minutes. Uncover baking dish; sprinkle with remaining Parmesan. Bake until fennel is tender, about 30 minutes.

JOE'S STONE CRAB MUSTARD SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

Joe's Stone Crab is famous for this creamy sauce, which it serves as a condiment for stone crab claws. It's also a great dressing for sandwiches, salads, or other chilled seafood. See page 115 for a source for stone crab claws.

- **1 cup mayonnaise**
- **2 tbsp. half-and-half**
- **4 tsp. dry mustard**
- **2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 tsp. A.1. Steak Sauce**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Whisk mayonnaise, half-and-half, mustard, Worcestershire, and A.1. sauce in a bowl until smooth; season with salt and pepper and chill. Serve as a dipping sauce with all kinds of crab.

MUHAMMARA

(Red Pepper and Walnut Dip)

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

This piquant Middle Eastern dip is based on a recipe from author Peter Balakian. It takes its sweet and sour flavor from pomegranate molasses.

- **2 red bell peppers**
- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 slice white bread**
- **1 cup toasted walnuts**
- **2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice**
- **2 ½ tsp. Aleppo pepper or hot paprika (see page 115)**
- **2 tsp. pomegranate molasses (see page 115)**
- **1 clove garlic, chopped**
- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **Pita bread, for serving**

1. Arrange an oven rack 4" from heating element and heat oven to broil. Place peppers on an aluminum foil–lined baking sheet and broil, turning occasionally, until charred and soft, 15–20 minutes. Transfer peppers to a bowl and cover with plastic wrap; let cool. Meanwhile, heat oil in an 8" skillet over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. Add bread and cook, turning once, until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Transfer bread and oil to a food processor.

2. Stem, seed, and peel peppers and transfer them to food processor, along with walnuts, lemon juice, Aleppo pepper, pomegranate molasses, and garlic. Season with salt and process until slightly chunky or smooth. Serve with pita bread.

REFRIED BEANS WITH CHORIZO

SERVES 4–6

The recipe for this comforting dish (pictured on page 88) is based on one in *Doña Tomás: Discovering Authentic Mexican Cooking* by Thomas Schnetz and Dona Savitsky with Mike Wille (Ten Speed Press, 2006).

- **3 cups dried pinto beans, rinsed**
- **Kosher salt, to taste**
- **6 oz. fresh chorizo, casings removed**
- **1 cup lard**
- **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **2 tbsp. minced cilantro**

1. Put beans and 12 cups water into an 8-qt. pot; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, season with salt; cook, adding more water if necessary, until beans are very tender, 2–2 ½ hours. Drain beans, reserving 3 cups cooking liquid.

2. Heat a 6-qt. pot over medium-high heat. Add chorizo and cook, breaking up into small pieces, until crisp, 6–8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove half the chorizo; transfer to a plate and set aside. Add lard and let melt. Add beans; mash vigorously. Add 2 cups reserved cooking liquid; cook, stirring often, until hot, 3–5 minutes. (Stir in more liquid, if you like.) Season beans with salt and pepper and serve with reserved chorizo and cilantro.

ROASTED CAULIFLOWER WITH TAHINI SAUCE

SERVES 4–6

Roasting cauliflower in a very hot oven gives it an appealing crisp-tender texture and toasty flavor that pairs perfectly with the tart tahini dipping sauce in this dish (pictured on page 60).

- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **4 tsp. ground cumin**
- **2 heads cauliflower, cored and cut into 1 ½" florets**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **½ cup tahini**
- **3 cloves garlic, smashed and minced into a paste**
- **Juice of 1 lemon**

1. Heat oven to 500°. Toss together oil, cumin, cauliflower, and salt and pepper in a large bowl. Transfer to 2 rimmed baking sheets; spread out evenly. Bake, rotating pans from top to bottom and front to back, until cauliflower is browned and tender, 25–30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine tahini, garlic, lemon juice, and ½ cup water in a small bowl and season with salt. Serve cauliflower hot or at room temperature with tahini sauce.

SALATA ADAS

(Garlicky Lentil Salad)

SERVES 2–4

Author Carolyn Forché gave us the recipe for this Lebanese lentil salad (pictured on page 61). Serve it with roasted lamb or grilled sausages.

- **1 cup green lentils, rinsed**
- **6 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- **12 cloves garlic, minced**
- **3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice**
- **1 tsp. ground cumin**
- **¼ tsp. ground allspice**
- **1 tbsp. minced flat-leaf parsley**
- **1 tbsp. minced fresh mint**
- **Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

1. Bring lentils and 3 cups water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer until lentils are tender, about 35 minutes. Drain lentils and set aside.

2. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in an 8" skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and cook until soft, 7–8 minutes. Remove pan from heat and whisk in remaining oil, lemon juice, cumin, and allspice. Pour the garlic mixture over lentils. Add parsley and mint and season the lentils with salt and pepper; toss to combine. Serve lentils at room temperature.

DESSERT

KEY LIME PIE

SERVES 8

This classic pie (pictured on page 99) is based on the one served at Joe's Stone Crab in Miami. You can use Key limes or bottled Key lime juice—though Persian lime juice works well, too.

- **1 cup plus 2 ½ tbsp. graham cracker crumbs**
- **⅓ cup sugar**
- **5 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted**
- **1 ½ tbsp. lime zest (from 2 limes)**
- **3 egg yolks**
- **1 14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk**
- **⅔ cup fresh Key lime juice (see page 115)**
- **1 cup heavy cream, chilled**
- **1 tbsp. confectioners' sugar**

1. Heat oven to 350°. Pulse cracker crumbs, sugar, and butter in a food processor to combine. Press into bottom and sides of a 9" pie pan. Bake until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Let cool.

2. In a medium bowl, beat lime zest and egg yolks with a hand mixer until pale and thick, 5 minutes. Add milk and beat until thickened, 3–4 minutes more. Add lime juice; mix until smooth. Pour filling into pie crust; bake until filling is just set in the middle, 8–10 minutes. Let cool. In a medium bowl, whisk cream and confectioners' sugar to stiff peaks. Spread whipped cream over top of pie and chill 2–3 hours before serving.

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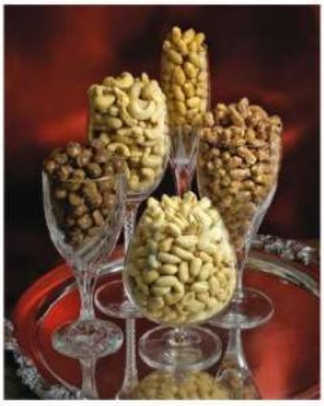

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SAVEUR's Summer BBQ

SUMMER BBQ PHOTOS: ANGELA DAWN

On Tuesday, June 22, 2010, SAVEUR brought together 16 of the nation's greatest chefs to kick off the summer season at Pier 66, Maritime in New York City. Chefs grilled, sautéed, and marinated their favorite summer dishes to share with guests along the Hudson River. Attendees had an array of great options to fill their plates, including abbacchio with a mint pesto, strip steak sliders, roast duck bao buns, and grilled squid salad.

Alongside chef specialties, SAVEUR served up Ben & Jerry's specialty desserts, a California Avocado Seafood Cocktail, 10 Cane Rum mojitos and daiquiris, Chateau St. Jean wine, and Dogfish Head Brewery beer. Sister publication Garden Design had a lounge outfitted with Lee Furniture and Mohawk flooring, where guests could sit back, relax, take in the summer weather, and enjoy the stunning city views.

CHEFS INCLUDED:

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Gramercy Tavern

April Bloomfield
The Breslin, The Spotted Pig

Jimmy Bradley & Bill McDaniel
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IN THE SAVEUR

KITCHEN

Discoveries and Techniques from Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman

Small but Mighty

Florida's favorite pie owes its flavor to the Key lime

TANGY, CREAMY KEY LIME PIE—A POPULAR dessert at Joe's Stone Crab in Miami (see "Happy Birthday, at Last," page 70)—derives its tartness from its tiny but powerful namesake fruit, the Key lime. Native to Asia and grown now in tropical and subtropical regions worldwide, the Key lime, a Ping-Pong ball–sized citrus fruit also known as the West Indian or Mexican lime, is the most widely used lime in kitchens outside the U.S. It's an essential ingredient in everything from salads to noodle dishes to marinades, prized for its dynamic acidity (which is at its greatest when the fruit is green and unripe) and copious juice. Mixed with eggs and sweetened condensed milk, the Key lime's zest and juice make for one intensely citrusy filling. The flavor of the Persian lime, the cultivar most readily available in U.S. markets, is much milder by comparison. So, why aren't Key limes as widely used here as in the rest of the world? It has something to do with the fruit's checkered new-world history. Arriving in the Caribbean with Christopher Columbus, the Key lime thrived in the region, including in Florida, up through the early 20th century. Then, in 1926, a hurricane wiped out most of the Sunshine State's crop, which was replaced with plantings of the larger, thicker-skinned Persian, a lime considered sturdier and therefore easier to cultivate and transport. A few of the original trees survived in the Florida Keys, where the fruit acquired its American name and where, in the 19th century, the eponymous pie was invented. —*Ben Mims*

TODD COLEMAN (4)

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Oceans of Flavor

While researching nori (see "The Beauty of Nori," page 39), we invited chef Toshio Suzuki, of the New York City restaurant Sushi Zen, to visit the SAVEUR test kitchen. Suzuki is passionate about nori and over the years has devised new ways of using it. (In the 1960s, when his American customers were still leery about eating seaweed, he created the now ubiquitous "inside-out roll," in which the nori is hidden within a layer of rice.) During his visit, he showed us how to prepare *tsukudani*, a traditional condiment of *yakinori* (see page 42), in which the toasted nori sheets are pickled in soy sauce, mirin, rice vinegar, and sugar and simmered down to a silken paste that lends a complex flavor—salty, sweet, and umami—to everything it's eaten with. In Japan

it's used to garnish steamed rice; it's delicious atop an omelette or stirred into soups, and it can even be used to flavor cream sauces and salad dressings. But Suzuki blew us away with one simple snack: a water cracker with a smear of the *tsukudani*, topped with a dab of sour cream. The preparation highlighted the subtle texture and briny flavor of the condiment, which now melted and lingered in the mouth like caviar. —*Karen Shimizu*

TSUKUDANI

(Pickled Nori)

MAKES 1¾ CUPS

- 1½ oz. yakinori sheets (see page 115)
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 3 tbsp. mirin
- 3 tbsp. rice vinegar
- 1½ tbsp. sugar

Soak the sheets of yakinori in water for 5 minutes; drain them. Transfer yakinori to the center of a tea towel and squeeze it to expel the excess liquid. Put yakinori into a 2-quart saucepan over medium heat and add the soy sauce, mirin, rice vinegar, and sugar. Bring the nori mixture to a simmer, reduce the heat to low, and cook the mixture, stirring occasionally, until almost all of the liquid has evaporated, about 15 minutes. Transfer the pickled nori to a bowl and chill it before serving.

Beyond Baths

While dining at the Golden Wok in Red Hook, New York (see "Mystery Vegetable," page 84), author Daniel Pinkwater stumbled upon a vegetable that, though common in Chinese cookery, is virtually unheard of in U.S. kitchens. Loofah, a long green gourd, turns fibrous as it grows; dried, mature loofah is familiar to Americans as a bath sponge. But young loofah is a tender, adaptable vegetable; with its porous texture and cucumbery flavor, it takes well to preparations in which it can soak up sauces and the flavors of other ingredients. In China, loofah is steamed, boiled, or stir-fried with garlic, onions, or dried prawns, and it's used as a cooling ingredient in spicy dishes. Of the two key types of loofah, the ridged variety, called angled loofah (pictured, below), must be peeled to remove its sharp ridges before cooking; the more bulbous, smooth loofah, or sponge gourd, can simply be washed and sliced. Make sure to buy an ample quantity, as loofah shrinks as it cooks. (See THE PANTRY, page 115, for a source.) —*Nicole Weinberg*

Cakey vs. Chewy When testing the flat and chewy chocolate chip cookies (see "Recipes of Record," page 28), we made two batches of cookies that came out, despite identical ingredients, with vastly different textures. Kitchen assistant Andy Baraghani made the first batch, following the recipe to the letter: finely process the chocolate and nuts, flatten the dough, and bake it in a low, 325-degree oven. His cookies turned out thin as wafers and irresistibly chewy. In a contrary mood, I deviated from the instructions, leaving the chocolate and nuts chunky, forgoing the flattening, and baking the dough in a hotter oven. My cookies were thick and cakey. The differences were attributable to our techniques: My higher oven temperature allowed my cookies to set before spreading, and the air pockets around the chunky nuts and chocolate in my cookies helped them stay puffy as they baked. Andy's dough, already flattened, had time to spread even thinner in his relatively cool oven. Moreover, his finely grated chocolate melted more readily, adding to the liquidity of his dough and contributing to its spread. Textural distinctions amply demonstrated, the flat and chewy cookies proved far more popular. —*B.M.*

Duck Hunt

Which birds to look for, and why

No other bird boasts as much flavor and utility as duck. The breasts are delicious sautéed or roasted; the legs, when braised to make confit, add richness to stews and succulence to salads; the carcass and wings make a knockout stock; and the rendered fat lends depth to fried and roasted foods. To make the most of this versatile bird, seek out the breed that suits the dish you're preparing.

For dishes like duck à l'orange (see a recipe on page 48), in which various duck parts are cooked separately, we prefer mild, meaty **Pekin** duck (pictured, right). Often labeled Long Island duckling, Pekin is available in supermarkets, inexpensive, and easy to work with. The tender breast should be sautéed, while its muscular legs take to braising.

Native to South America and leaner than Pekin, the deeply flavored **Muscovy** duck takes well to roasting or stewing. For roasting, select the smaller female.

The breast of the gamey **Mallard**, an exceptionally lean North American duck available in markets during the fall, is delicious when wrapped in bacon and smoked, which keeps the meat moist. Stew the small legs in gumbo or use them to make stocks and sauces.

The large **Moulard**, a cross between Muscovy and Pekin, is often fed grain to fatten its liver for foie gras. It is prized as well for its rich flesh, a result of that diet. Look for its meaty breasts, which are sold separately and labeled "magret." Sauté or grill them medium-rare like a steak.

To purchase any of these ducks whole or in parts, including rendered fat and confit, contact D'Artagnan (800/327-8246; www.dartagnan.com). —*Hunter Lewis*

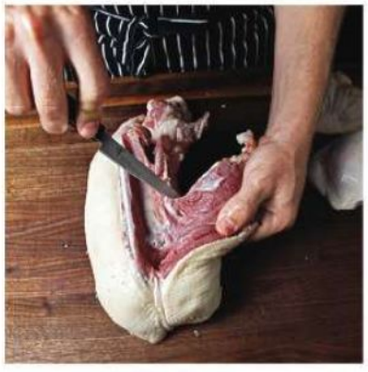
Bird Breakdown

With a whole duck, "nothing goes to waste except the beak," says Ariane Daugin, owner of the New Jersey–based meat and poultry supplier D'Artagnan. We agree. To make duck à l'orange (see "Grande Dame," page 47), we recommend butchering a whole Pekin so you can sauté the breasts and braise the legs, basting them with the rendered fat, and use the wings and carcass to make the sauce. Here's how. —*H.L.*

❶ Place the duck breast side down on a cutting board. Using a small knife, make a cut underneath one of the wings and grasp it with your free hand to pull it away from the body. Cut under and around the joint to remove the wing. Repeat the process with the remaining wing; set both wings aside to brown with the carcass in a skillet or to roast in the oven to use as a base for a rich, flavorful duck stock in which to braise the duck legs.

❷ Turn duck breast side up. Make a cut between one leg and the body. Grasp the duck leg and pull it away from the body to expose the joint. With the knife angled flush against the carcass, cut under and around the joint and then, pulling the leg, cut down the back of the duck to detach the leg. Repeat with the remaining leg. Trim and reserve the excess fat away from each leg and set the legs aside for braising. (You can also cook the legs in duck fat to make confit.)

❸ Using your fingers, feel for the thin breastbone that runs down the length of the breast from the neck cavity to the tail. Working slowly and using the breastbone as your guide, cut down the length of bone about 1" deep until you reach the cartilaginous rib cage. Gently peel the breast away from the carcass, sliding your knife along the rib cage as you go. You want to see as little red flesh remaining on the rib cage as possible, so as not to let any breast meat go to waste.



❹ Continue peeling the breast from the carcass, sliding your knife under the flesh along the rib cage toward the tail end. Then, work back up toward the neck end and cut around the wishbone. Gently free the breast by sliding the knife against the carcass. Repeat with the other breast. Cut off and reserve the tail and neck fat and any fat from the carcass. Invert each breast skin side down and trim and reserve the excess fat for a more elegant presentation.

❺ The wings and legs are now ready for cooking. Using a cleaver, chop the carcass into manageable pieces. Roast the carcass and wings in the oven or brown them in a skillet to make the base for a rich stock. Finely chop the reserved fat and heat it in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat until the clear fat renders, about 1–2 hours. Strain the fat and refrigerate or freeze it for use later on when frying potatoes, making confit, or cooking an omelette.

❻ Scoring the thick layer of fat covering the top of each breast allows the fat to render out in the pan more quickly as you sauté; it also yields a crispier texture. Arrange a breast skin side up and facing you at a 45-degree angle. Using a sharp knife, make diagonal cuts spaced about ¼" apart through the fat without piercing the flesh. Turn the breast 45 degrees and cut crosswise incisions spaced ¼" apart to make a diamond pattern. Repeat with the remaining breast.

TODD COLEMAN (7)

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Tamed Heat

Since fresh Indian *naga jolokia* chiles are nearly impossible to find in the U.S., we decided when making Suketa Mehta's vegetarian chili (see page 102) to substitute habaneros. We understood that our biggest challenge would be to tame the chile (pictured, below), the world's third hottest, so that it would shine in the dish without wreaking digestive havoc. We knew that much of the habanero's capsaicin (the chemical responsible for spiciness) resides in the interior tissue that holds the seeds, so we first tried seeding the pepper before chopping it. But the heat released from the cut membranes still yielded a chili far too hot to enjoy. Then, we tried stewing the habaneros whole, which gave us a dish that lacked the requisite kick. Finally, donning rubber gloves and using a paring knife, we simply slit the chiles before cooking them, making a lengthwise incision from the shoulder of each pepper's stem to the tip. This technique coaxed out just enough of both the habanero's floral sweetness and its trademark burn, giving us a chili that we all agreed was just right.
—*Jordan Goldstein*

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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered sources too good to keep to ourselves.

BY BEN MIMS

Fare

When in Detroit, stop by **American Coney Island** (114 West Lafayette Boulevard; 313/961-7758) and **Lafayette Coney Island** (118 West Lafayette Boulevard; 313/964-8198). Purchase live geoduck from Taylor Shellfish Farms ($24.95 per pound; 360/432-3300; www.taylorshellfishstore.com). To sample vintage candies when in New York City, stop by **Economy Candy** (108 Rivington Street; 212/254-1531). Visit **Casa Montaña** (Calle de José Benlliure, 69, Valencia, Spain; 34/96/367-2314) for the *patatas bravas*. Purchase the **G'Vine Floraison gin** from Borisal Liquor & Wine ($34; 800/658-8149; www.drinkupny.com).

Routes

When in northeast Ohio (see page 30), stop by: **West Side Market** (1979 West 25th Street; 216/664-3387), **Hot Sauce Williams** (7815 Carnegie Avenue; 216/391-2230), and **Balaton** (13133 Shaker Square; 216/921-9691) in Cleveland; **Perla Homemade Delights** (5380 State Road; 216/741-9222), **State Meats** (5338 State Road; 216/398-0183), and **Little Polish Diner** (5772 Ridge Road; 440/842-8212) in Parma; **Babushka's Kitchen** (9199 Olde Eight Road, Suite D, Northfield Center; 330/468-0402); **Cathedral Buffet** (2690 State Road, Cuyahoga Falls; 330/922-0467); **Belgrade Gardens** (401 East State Street; 330/745-0113) and **Al's Corner Restaurant** (545 West Tuscarawas Avenue; 330/475-7978) in Barberton; and **Taggarts** (1401 Fulton Road NW; 330/452-6844) in Canton. **The InterContinental** (9801 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland; 216/707-4100) is a good base of operations.

Cellar

To sample carignan wines, order the **2006 Domaine Leon Barral Faugeres** from Zachys ($24; 800/723-0241; www.zachys.com); the **2008 Domaine Rimbert Les Travers de Marceau** ($15), **2006 Domaine des 2 Ânes Fontanilles** ($16), and **2005 Clos du Gravillas Lo Vièlh Carignan** ($19) from Chambers Street Wines (212/227-1434; www.chambersstwines.com); the **2007 Domaine de Fontsainte "Reserve la Demoiselle"** ($16) and **2008 Maxime Magnon "Campagnès"** ($26) from Kermit Lynch Wine Merchants (510/524-1524; www.kermitlynch.com); the **2008 Domaine Rimbert Le Mas au Schiste** ($14) and **2007 Domaine des 2 Ânes Premier Pas** ($15) from Astor Wines (212/674-7500; www.astorwines.com); the **2008 Domaine Anne Gros/Jean-Paul Tollot Les Carrétals Minervois** from North Berkeley Wine ($60; 800/266-6585; www.northberkeleyimports.com); and the **2007 Domaine Massamier La Mignarde Expression Carignan** from 67 Wines ($22; 212/724-6767; www.67wine.com).

Ingredient

Purchase nori (see page 39) from the following sources: **aonori** ($4.55 for a 0.28-ounce bag) and **iwanori** ($4.35 for a 3.53-ounce bag) from eFoodDepot.com (866/256-9210; www.efooddepot.com), **namanori** from Navitas Naturals ($5.69 for a 10-sheet package; 888/645-4282; www.navitasnaturals.com), **yakinori** from KoaMart ($2.99 for a 0.75-ounce bag; 213/272-3480; www.koamart.com), **ajitsukenori** from Pacific Mercantile Company ($2.69 for a 0.8-ounce bottle; 303/295-0293; www.pacificeastwest.com), and **aosa** from Akabanaa ($4.98 for a 0.35-ounce bag; 415/567-8565; www.store.akabanaa.com).

Great Meals

To prepare the crab pot pie (see page 100), purchase **crab soup base** from Integrative Flavors ($13.50 for a 16-ounce container; 219/879-8236; www.integrativeflavors.com). To make the sea bream and turnip hot pot (see page 101), order **kombu** ($6.80 for a 2.1-ounce bag) and **dried bonito flakes** ($6.17 for a 1.05-ounce bag) from Eden Foods (517/456-7025; www.edenfoods.com). To make the hot and sour shrimp soup (see page 101), buy **roasted Thai chile paste**, available from ImportFood.com ($4.79 for a 16-ounce jar; look for "chile paste with soyabean oil"; 888/618-8424; www.importfood.com). To prepare the stir-fried loofah (see page 102), use **loofah gourd**, available from Melissa's/World Variety Produce (price varies by availability; look for "Chinese okra"; 800/588-0151; www.melissas.com). Order **stone crab claws** (to accompany Joe's Stone Crab mustard sauce, recipe on page 104) from Joe's Stone Crab ($124 for a stone crab dinner for two; 800/780-2722; www.joesstonecrab.com). To make the red pepper and walnut dip (see page 104), purchase **pomegranate molasses** ($3.49 for a 4-ounce bottle) and **Aleppo pepper** ($4.28 for a 2-ounce jar) from the Spice House (847/328-3711; www.thespicehouse.com). To make Key lime pie (see page 104), buy **Key lime juice** from Southern Connoisseur ($3.49 for a 16-ounce bottle; 888/339-2477; www.southernconnoisseur.com) or **Key limes** from Melissa's/World Variety Produce ($15.80 for 4 pounds; see above).

Kitchen

To purchase **Key limes**, contact Melissa's/World Variety Produce (see above). To make the *tsukudani* (see page 111), purchase **yakinori** from KoaMart (see above).

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FAVORITE Foodie Finds

Our board members travel every inch of the globe to bring you the best in culinary destinations. Here, we share some of their highlights.

KATIE MCCORMACK KRINKIE relaxed at the Grand Del Mar Resort in San Diego, where she hiked, indulged in spa treatments, and experienced a private tasting in the resort's extensive wine cellar.

LAURIE SACZAWA discovered a luscious blend of Napa Valley Sangiovese, Nebbiolo, and Petit Verdot grapes. Not a wine, but a sumptuously aromatic, barrel-aged, hand-crafted vinegar—slightly sweet with elegant notes of caramel and chocolate.

STACY LUKS visited Québec City, a historic jewel of New France's culture and cuisine, where she enjoyed divine local cheeses, smoked meats, patisseries, and dinner at L'Echaude in the Old Port.

WEEZIE GLASCOCK is traveling to Normandy this fall to revisit the delicious and memorable veal cutlets sautéed in butter and braised in cider, cream, and Calvados.

JEAN BUCK embarked on a spectacular cooking adventure in Provence, France. Think: pork chops prepared with paprika, bay leaves, and olive oil, all market-fresh. Yum!

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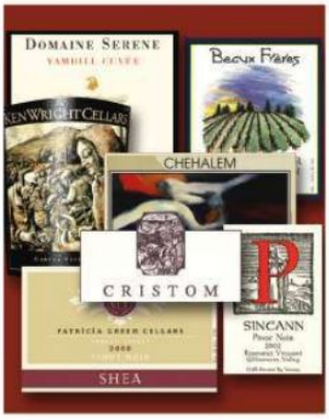

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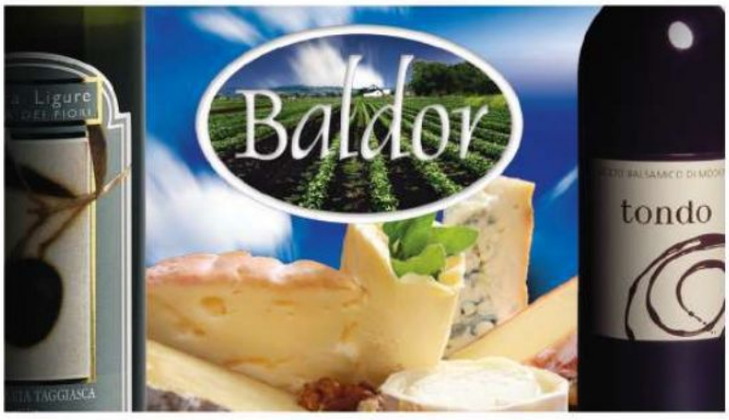

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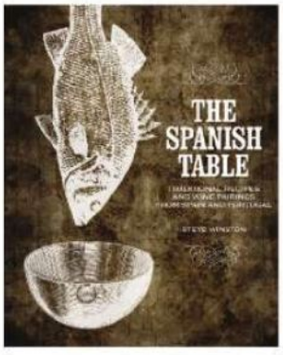

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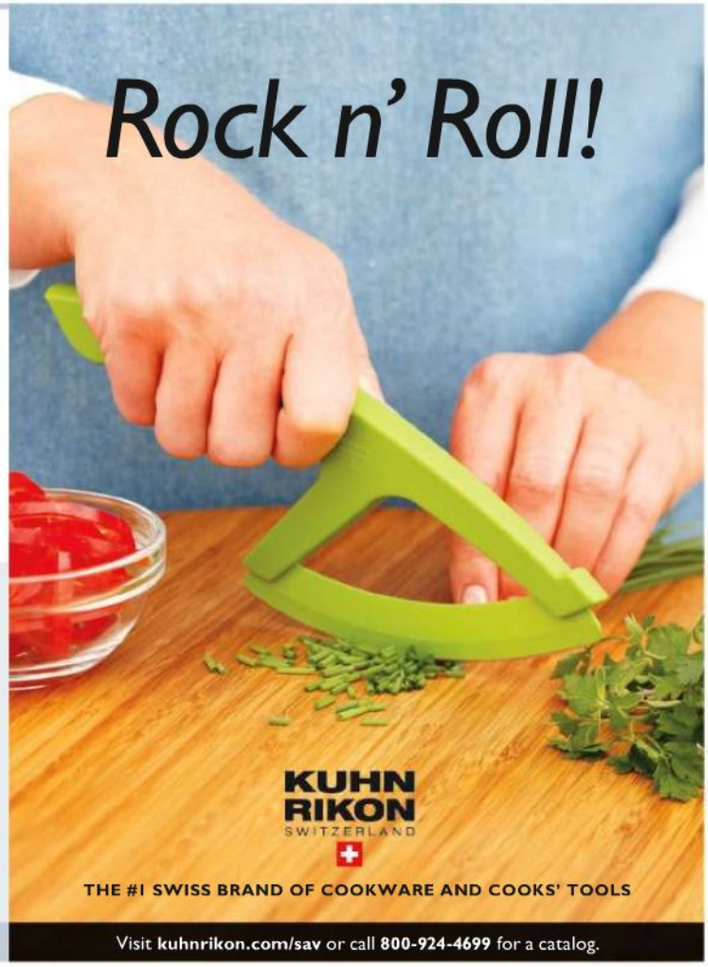

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